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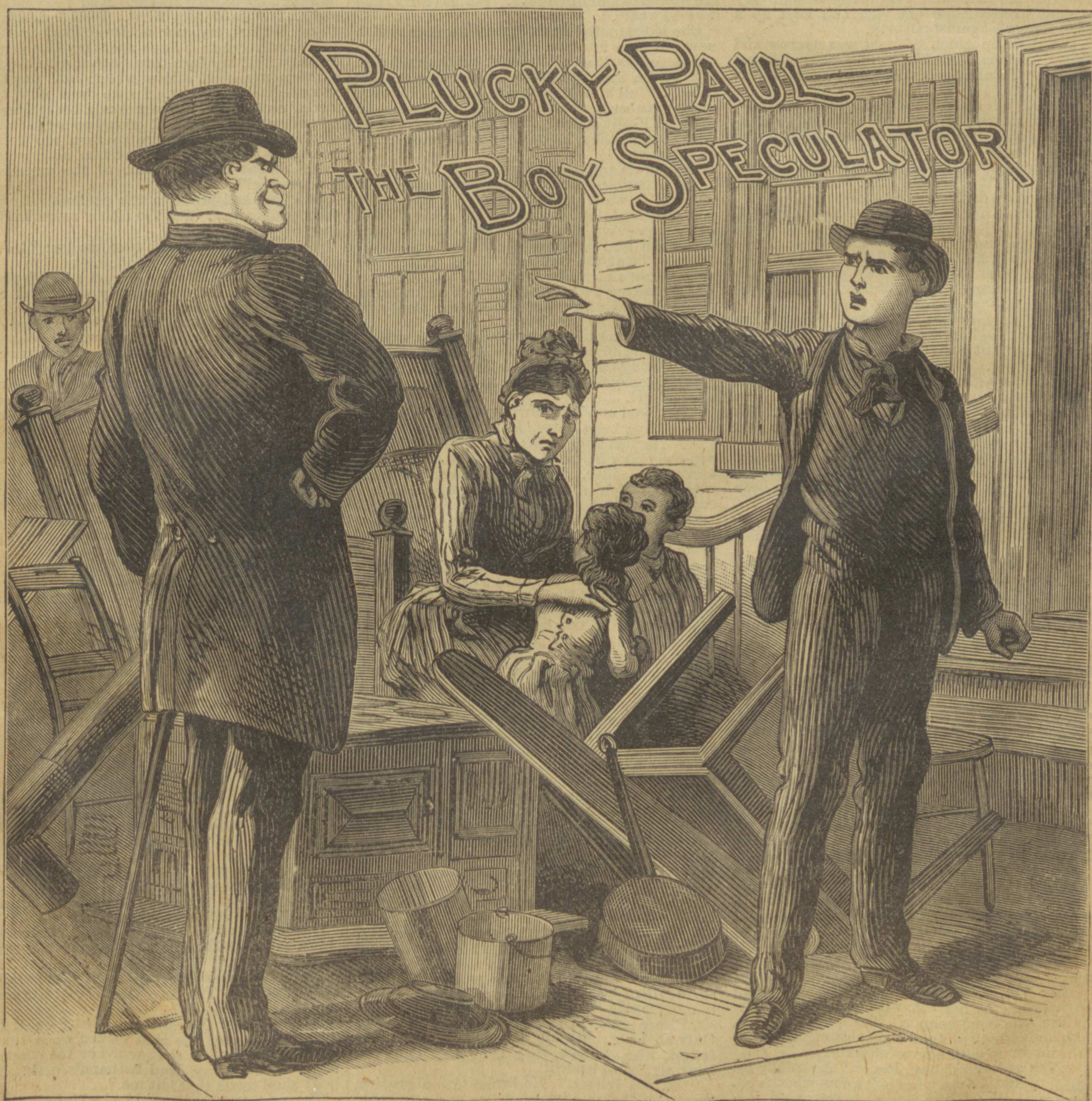
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"THE DAY WILL COME, IT IS BOUND TO COME, WHEN YOU WILL LIVE IN MY HOUSE AND WILL BEG ME TO WAIT FOR MY RENT!"

Plucky Paul, THE BOY SPECULATOR;

OR,
GOING FOR OLD SLINK.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "WILD DICK RACKET," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SOULLESS SIMON SLINK.

"THERE'S no use, mother. I've been to them all. Not one of them will come to our aid. They've twisted their fingers round their money-bags so tight that you couldn't open them with a crowbar. But don't you mind. We'll come out all right yet."

The speaker, a handsome boy of some eighteen years of age, dressed in well worn and darned, but not ragged clothes, threw himself listlessly on a chair, as if he was worn out with his efforts.

His mother looked up in terror at his words. She was a woman who had once been very good-looking, though she was now faded and sad-eyed. Trouble seemed to have added twenty years to her life. She was neatly though very cheaply dressed, like one who had kept up a hard struggle against poverty.

The room in which they sat was narrow and dingy, and half-furnished with the cheapest articles. To all appearances they were desperately poor.

"Don't be scared, mother," said the boy, cheerily, looking up into the poor lady's woe-begone face. "We'll fight it through yet, you and I. I'm a little good-for-nothing, I know. You've spoiled me trying to make a gentleman of me. But it won't hurt me. I'm solid oak. Just see if we don't pull through."

"But what are we to do now?" she answered, throwing up her hands in desperation. "He will have no mercy. He is as hard as iron. We have got only till five o'clock, and it is past four now. He must have his money, or he will turn us into the street without pity. Oh, Roger! what are we—what are we to do?"

"Keep up your spirits, I guess. It is always the darkest the hour before day, you know. Let the old skinflint have the furniture for the rent, if he wants it. It isn't worth much, anyhow."

Roger cast a glance of scorn on the sorry show of furniture.

"But it is our all, my son. It is our all. We must live. There are the little ones, Tom and Lucy. We cannot desert them."

"And we aren't going to, either. We've got three friends left yet, and they are friends who won't go back on us, like the shirks I've been after to-day."

"Three friends," repeated Mrs. Wilton, in surprise. "What three friends? What do you mean, Roger? Where are these friends?"

"Here are two of them," and the boy held out his vigorous arms. "There's muscle there, mother. There wasn't a boy at school could handle me. And I'm not afraid of work, I don't care how hard it is. I bet those two friends don't go back on me."

A feeble smile came to the mother's weary face.

"But where is the third friend, Roger?"

"He's the best of all," said the boy, laughing. "Here he is." He touched his hand to his head. "I don't want to brag, but I've a notion there are some brains in that box. And education counts. If you haven't taught me how to work you've taught me how to think, and that's better."

"I hope so, I hope so," she cried despairingly. "But, it is so dark, so very dark, before us. We are on the brink of ruin. You have tried, Roger, and you've found nothing to do."

"I haven't wakened up yet, mother. I've been looking for gentlemanly jobs. I was only a school-boy yesterday, with more pride than sense. This business to-day has made a man of me. I'm tired of hunting work. I'm going to make work! And I don't care what it is. If it's honest and has money in it, that's all I ask."

Poor Mrs. Wilton looked at the eager and earnest face of her son with a shadow of hope in her pale countenance. She walked over to him and rested her hand on his strong shoulder. He looked up with a hopeful smile.

"You are a good boy, Roger," she mildly replied. "But I fear you don't know what is before you. When you go out in the world you will find that you have not men but wolves to

deal with. And they are ready to tear one another to pieces for their share of the spoil. What will a poor little boy like you do among such ravening beasts?"

"I reckon I'll hold my own. And they're not all wolves, either. Don't give up the ship, mother. Maybe the tide is ready to turn. It's hard just now, I know, but it isn't quite past salvation. Can you think of any other of father's friends that it is worth going to see?"

"No, my son."

"Of your own friends, then. You must have some. Think, mother."

A change came over the poor woman's face. She sunk in a chair and rested her head on her hand. Her lips worked, though no sound came from them. Roger looked at her curiously.

"Who knows?" she murmured. "I have never seen him since that old time. He is more likely to hate than to help me. But our need is desperate. I can but try."

"Who is it?" asked Roger. "Give me his name. I've turned over a new rule in business. I'm going to try every chance, no matter how risky. Where will I find him?"

She looked up with a doubtful face.

"I hardly know. It does not seem wise. But—"

"But it has got to be done." Roger's tone was decided. The boy meant business. "Give me his name and directions. We have no time now to waste."

She looked into her son's resolute face and a new life came into her own.

"Here it is, Roger," she said, writing it down. "Mr. John Burnaud, 65 Commerce street. Go to him. Tell him the strait we are in. He may not remember my name. Tell him it is one he knew as Emily Allen. He will not forget that. And now, my boy, let us pray that fortune may go with you."

Roger rose and seized his hat.

"If old Slink comes round before I get back, tell him to wait," he directed. "If he pushes you too hard now, the time will come when I will get even with him. The world keeps turning round, and they who are at the bottom to-day may be at the top to-morrow. That's one of the lessons I learned at school."

He was away, with a cheery look and a brisk step. It was clear that there was plenty of solid grit in Roger Wilton.

Mrs. Wilton sunk back into her chair with a strange look on her wasted face. Old memories were coming back to her, and a smile illumined her countenance, such as she might have worn when a girl.

"He loved me," she murmured. "Perhaps it would have been better if I had returned his love. He has fought his way into a fortune, while my poor husband was always at the bottom of the ladder. But I loved Harry Wilton, with all his faults, and love has sweetened the cup of poverty."

She sat thus, lost in recollections of the past, while the slow minutes crept on and the time of probation slipped by.

At length the hour of five sounded from a neighboring clock. As it did so she sprung up in alarm. For, at the same moment, the outer door was heard to open, hard steps came along the bare floor of the hall, the door of the room in which she sat was pushed ajar, and several persons entered.

The foremost of these was a person who would have attracted attention anywhere. He was a short, stout-built man, with shoulders so rounded that they seemed almost humped. His face was sleek and sordid, with greasy-looking lips, that had an unhealthy fashion of smirking, and little, twinkling eyes.

It was the face of a man who seemed destitute of a soul. There was something decidedly unpleasant in the perpetual smile that marked his ugly countenance, and in his long arms and hands with their hooked fingers. It looked as if the business of his life was to grasp, and as if that smile was hung out as a bait to unwary fish.

The persons who followed him were ordinary-looking individuals.

"Well, Mrs. Wilton," he said brusquely. "The time is up. What answer? Are you ready to pay me my rent?"

The poor widow had risen to her feet, and stood with a terror-stricken countenance before him, wringing her hands unconsciously.

"Please give me an hour more, Mr. Slink. Only an hour. My son has gone to see an old friend, who, I hope, may help me. Only an hour, sir," she pleaded.

"An old friend!" He broke into a grating laugh. "That old friend dodge is played out. I must have my money or my property, Mrs.

Wilton. I have lost enough already. Are you ready to pay?"

"No, sir," she cried despairingly. "I have done all I could, but I cannot raise the money. Do give us time, sir. My son is young and strong. He will get something to do. He will pay you."

"Your son!" Again that grating laugh. "That young rascal that you wanted brought up as a gentleman! I told Harry Wilton twenty times that he was a fool. And so he was. He lived and died a fool. But I have no time to prate here. You know your duty, gentlemen."

He turned to his companions, who consisted of a constable and his assistants.

Mrs. Wilton fired up at this insult to her dead husband. Her eyes flashed, and a hot flush fired her cheek.

"Don't dare say that again, Simon Slink! You shall not insult my husband's memory. Why is not my son here now, to kick you out of doors for your impudence? Listen to me, gentlemen." She turned to the constable. "I have lived ten years in this house, and the rent has always been paid to the day. My husband was in this man's employment. He worked for him for years at starvation wages. He always paid his rent. He always kept his family in decent comfort. He determined that his son should have an education, and not pass through life a mere drudge like his father. And I say he was right. I uphold him in it. Well, gentlemen, Harry Wilton, my poor husband, has been but two months dead. I have spent my last penny and sold half my furniture since then in trying to keep my head above water, and pay this money-shark his rent. I owe him now two weeks' rent, a pitiful two weeks, after ten years, and after all he made off of my poor husband's services. And he is here to turn me out of doors! What do you think of him now, gentlemen? What do you think of the smirking, soulless dog?"

The two assistants to the constable turned their heads away. But the officer stood impassive.

"I know nothing about that, madam," he replied. "I am here under orders."

The old miser's face had turned a bluish tinge as Mrs. Wilton so scornfully expressed her opinion of his conduct.

"Do your duty, men," he said in a voice like a snarl. "Never mind this woman's palaver. She refuses to pay. You have your warrant. Do your duty."

The constable turned to his companions, who stood irresolute.

"Come, boys," he remarked. "We have our orders. Of course we are sorry for this poor lady, but we have to obey the law. She refuses to pay the rent due. Her goods must be put out of the house."

He set the example by seizing a table, which he carried out of the room. His comrades, with some show of shame, turned to follow his example, one seizing a couple of chairs, the other kneeling to tear up the ragged carpet.

During this operation old Slink stood back against the wall, a harsh look on his ill-favored face. Mrs. Wilton threw up her hands in despair.

"I have tried, heaven knows I have tried, to do my duty, and pay my debts," she declared. "If I had a man to deal with, instead of this human shark, I would never have been driven thus. Here, here, take all!" she cried, as she saw the room denuded of its scanty furniture. "Take all, the living and the lifeless."

She rushed with an insane movement into another room, and returned, holding two children by the hand, a pretty little girl and boy.

"Take all," she continued. "Take these, too! Here, Simon Slink, take the last treasures of the widow. Poor, poor, little desolate orphans!"

She bent her head over the wondering children, while the repressed tears flowed freely from her eyes.

"Hurry up, men!" cried Simon, sternly. "I am getting sick of this."

The constable paused in his operations, and looked fiercely at the old miser.

"Suppose you hold your tongue," he growled. "It's bad enough as it is. Hang such a dirty business, I say!"

The old villain slunk back, a little crestfallen at this rebuke. The men continued their sorry work.

"Leave that. Don't touch that," cried the widow, as one of the men picked up a small, walnut writing-desk that rested on the window-sill. "That is my dead husband's desk. Nobody shall touch that but me."

The man drew back, and looked into the next room for something else.

"Take everything," cried Simon, fiercely. "Don't leave a stick or a rag. I'll pay you up, madam, for your insults. My house shall be cleared of your rubbish. Here goes your desk!"

He snatched it up and bore it to the door himself, followed by the indignant eyes of the insulted woman.

"I pray to Heaven that this last act of outrage may prove your own ruin, Simon Slink! May that desk, in some providential way, turn the tide of your ill-gotten fortune, and bring on you the fate which your cruel hand has brought on me and mine!"

He laughed in harsh disdain.

"I'll take the risk," he said. "My fortune has sailed past worst dangers than this bit of carved wood."

He flung the desk, more rudely than he intended, on the pile of furniture heaped on the pavement. Its joints cracked at the shock, and the bottom yawned, at one corner, from the sides. Some papers showed at the rent.

But without heed to this the old miser turned back into the house. He did not, in his inmost soul, dream, that in those papers lay hidden the ruin which the widow had denounced on his head.

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD FRIEND IN NEED.

THE last article of furniture had been landed upon the pavement. The house was locked and the key handed to the owner. Mrs. Wilton, with her children by her side, sat in despair amid her poor household goods. A group of neighbors were standing by, with surprised and pitying looks. The constable and his aids had hurried away, as if a little ashamed of their work. But Simon Slink still remained, with a look on his ugly face as if he gloated over his deed.

Mrs. Wilton's biting words had touched the old rascal in some sore points, and he stood looking at her with a glare of revenge in his cat-like eyes.

"You've brought it on yourself, Emily Wilton," he said, with a snarl. "Maybe it will learn you, another time, not to insult gentlemen that are only asking for their rights."

"Get out of my sight, you ugly wretch!" she cried, bitterly. "Never let me see your despicable face again! And the curse of the widow and the orphan go with you! To think of it! After my poor husband served you faithfully for ten years! He is no sooner dead than you turn his widow out into the street, without a shelter for her head, or a fire to warm her."

"I paid Harry Wilton his wages as long as he earned them," replied Simon, harshly. "I don't owe anything to a dead man, any more than I do to a dead dog. I will have nobody in my house that don't pay their rent."

At this heartless response, that broke the poor widow down into tears, one of the onlookers stepped indignantly forward.

But at that moment a lithe and active youthful form sprang briskly before him with flashing eyes and burning cheeks. It was Roger Wilton, returned from his quest.

"What is this?" he cried fiercely. The boy from that moment was a man. "My mother turned into the street, and this old wretch insulting her in her misery! Did you not tell him where I was gone, mother?"

"Yes. But he would not wait. He would not listen."

The boy turned on the old miser with a look that made him slink back in alarm. Roger looked double his size at that moment. His lips curled with scorn and contempt.

"You are an old man," he said, with bitter emphasis. "I won't lay my hands on you. But I have some words for your ear. I tell you this, Simon Slink, and you had better remember it. I will have revenge on you for this deed, if I have to give my life to it! You are a rich man and I am a poor boy. But I will make money, and you will lose it. Honest and hard work will make me rich, and rascality will make you poor. The day will come, it is bound to come, when you will live in my house and will beg me to wait for my rent! And on that day I will turn you pitilessly into the street, as you have turned my mother and her children today. Remember that, Simon Slink. The world turns round."

At these prophetic words, delivered in a tone of belief and determination, the old fellow turned visibly pale. But the next moment he burst into a scornful laugh.

"How the young cock does crow," he ejaculated. "Do your worst, boy. I'll have my rights."

"And I'll have my revenge. You said some-

thing about my father being a dead dog. You shall find that I am a live boy. And now be off with you, before I am roused to lay my hands on you, you human wolf!"

Roger looked so fierce that his mother sprang up in alarm and caught hold of her fiery son.

"Don't, my son! Don't touch him! He will have the law of you."

"But I will!" exclaimed one of the women who was standing by. "The insulting old hound! To turn a poor widow into the street, and then stand and pick at her! I'll tear his ugly eyes from his face!"

She came forward so threateningly, supported by the lowering looks of her companions, that old Slink drew fearfully back and shuffled away from the angry termagant.

"He is running away, the ugly dog! Shall we let him go without a drubbing?"

"No," came the answer from several of her companions.

Fierce with indignation they rushed at the old miser, who was backing off in alarm. He had not women like Mrs. Wilton to deal with now, but rough-mannered though honest matrons, who were not likely to handle him gently if he once fell into their hands.

As they came near he turned and ran. But he was too late. Ere he made many steps the woman in advance grasped him by the collar. In a minute more a half-dozen pairs of hands had hold of him, and he was being pulled and hustled about, scratched and buffeted, until he roared like a calf for help.

"Let us roll him in the mud," cried the leader of the assailants. "Here is a wet spot. Let us spoil his broadcloth for him."

It was no sooner said than done. The howling old wretch was jerked down in a particularly muddy spot in the wet street, and rolled backward and forward, until he was covered from head to foot with a thick plaster of sticky and loud-smelling street mud, which had been softened by a recent rain.

The leading termagant ended her work by plastering a double handful of the sticky stuff on his head and eyes, and then clapping his hat down tightly on it.

"That's the widow's mite!" she said, with a shrill laugh. "Now let him go. I don't think he will come here to gloat over his dirty work again."

Released from his tormentors old Simon picked himself slowly up. He was a sorry spectacle as he stood there exposed to their jeering laughter.

"I'll have the law of you all!" he cried, with a wolfish snarl. "I'll teach you, you foul-mouthed wenches—"

"Give him another roll!" exclaimed the foremost. "He is insulting a decent woman."

They sprang forward again. At this threatening move the plastered rogue turned and ran like a deer with a pack of wolves at his heels, still yelling for the police at every step.

This time he distanced them. They were too full of laughter to follow him closely. They returned, after a few steps, to where the poor widow and her family were observing them with looks of satisfaction.

"We've given him a lesson," said the stalwart matron who had been the leader in this proceeding. "He won't show his ugly mug round here again soon. If he does we'll give him another roll. And now, my poor woman, what are you going to do? Have you no place to go to? It looks like rain."

"No place," bemoaned the despairing widow. "I have no shelter for my head. I and my children must be left to the cold skies."

"You shall not!" cried the woman, impetuously. "We are all poor enough, the Lord knows, but we have hearts. I'll give you shelter myself, for to-night. And we'll see that your furniture is taken in off the street."

"That we will," exclaimed the others, heartily. "Don't look so troubled, Mrs. Wilton."

"I cannot help it," she rejoined, breaking into tears. "You are all so kind. I cannot bear to impose on you."

During this conversation Roger had stood impassive, his eyes fixed on the spot where his enemy had been so justly dealt with, while a resolute look marked his flushed face. He was making a silent vow to carry to the end his stern prophecy of revenge.

He now turned, and his set face softened.

"Don't be worried, mother," he said. "I have seen Mr. Burnaud, and it will be all right. He is coming here right away."

A flush of joy came into Mrs. Wilton's face. It was followed by a look that was almost fright.

"Coming? He coming?" she muttered. "I thought he would have forgotten me."

"What are we to do?" asked one of the neighbors. "We are willing to help you."

"You are ever so kind," answered Mrs. Wilton. "But I know you can ill afford to care for any but your own. And I have sent for an old friend, who has promised to help me."

Further words were prevented by the approach of a stout-built, well-dressed person, with a very kindly face. He paused and looked with surprise on the scene before him.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Has he turned you into the street? This is worse than I expected. The boy did not tell me this."

"It was done after I left," answered Roger.

By this time the gentleman and Mrs. Wilton were face to face. Her looks were downcast, as if she could not bear to raise her eyes to those that looked on her so strangely.

"I am glad you remembered and sent for me," he said, in a low voice. "Why did you not send sooner? I did not dream you were tempted to such straits."

"These kind women have offered to take care of me," murmured Mrs. Wilton.

"That is very good in them," he replied, with a graceful bow to the group of neighbors. "But you shall not impose on their kindness. I know Simon Slink, and don't owe him any good-will. It will do me good to countermine the old rascal. Look around, somebody. Cannot we get a wagon to carry these goods?"

"I will bring you one," answered one of the men.

"But what are you going to do, Mr. Burnaud?" asked the widow, plaintively.

"First of all to get you under a roof," he answered. "Then to find you fire and food."

"But that is too much. I am poor. I cannot repay you."

"Oh, never mind that. We'll talk about that afterward."

The widow said nothing, but a look of pain came into her face. She could not bear to accept charity—and particularly from this man. He noticed her look, and quickly spoke.

"You poor?" he said. "Why, you have this brisk boy, and that's as good as a fortune. He looks able to pay me for all I do. It will be only a loan, Mrs. Wilton."

"I'll pay you all," answered Roger, proudly. "I am going to make money, Mr. Burnaud. I have just sworn that I am going to get rich, and pay out Simon Slink for what he has done to-day. And I mean it!"

The gentleman looked at him with a doubtful smile.

"It is not so easy to get rich, my boy."

"Not for everybody, I know. But it is going to be for me. You shall see."

"Well, well, you've got pluck, anyhow."

He slapped Roger heartily on the back.

At this moment the wagon for which he had sent arrived. By his directions the furniture was loaded into it, and the two frightened children, who had been clinging to their mother's gown, were safely lifted onto a bed that lay in the front of the wagon.

"There. Now drive to this place. I will be there before you." He gave written directions to the driver. "You can jump into the wagon, Roger, and take care of the children. I will bring your mother by the cars."

Mrs. Wilton looked flurried and frightened when the wagon, with her goods and children, had driven off, and she stood alone with her protector.

To hide her feelings she turned to the kindly neighbors, and thanked them again with a warm gratitude that showed her full appreciation of their generosity.

In a few minutes afterward she was in a street car with Mr. Burnaud.

Few words passed between them on their journey. Mrs. Wilton was moved too deeply for words, while Mr. Burnaud seemed full of some earnest feeling. An old lover of the faded woman by his side, rejected for another years ago, it is not strange that he felt deeply.

They were not long in reaching their destination. The wagon had stopped in a narrow street, before a small, but neat house, superior to that they had left. The wagoner, assisted by Roger, was already engaged in carrying the furniture into the house.

Mrs. Wilton looked at her conductor with eyes that were full of deep gratitude.

"This is too much, Mr. Burnaud," she said plaintively. "I feared to send to you at all, after—the past. But I was desperate. I thought—I thought—"

"You thought that John Burnaud still had a heart," he earnestly rejoined. "I once loved Emily Allen," he continued in a low tone. "I am one to whom old thoughts cling. You shall

not suffer if I can hinder it. There. Don't say anything. I must go now. I think I had better go. I will see you to-morrow in your new home."

He pressed her hand firmly, and walked away. She made no effort to detain him. She felt that if she spoke again she would utterly give way.

CHAPTER III.

A LAD OF METTLE.

THINGS looked comfortable in the new home of the Wiltons. The furniture had been carefully arranged, the rooms were clean and neat, and the poor lady had partly got rid of her sad and care-worn look.

The children were playing about the floor, happy in their ignorance of trouble and misery. At one side of the room Roger sat conversing with Mr. Burnaud, who had just called. The boy looked particularly sharp and bright. It would have been clear to any one that he was a boy with all his wits about him.

"So you want to get to work, Roger? You are in sound earnest?"

"I want to get rich, sir. In any way that's honest."

Mr. Burnaud laughed.

"I'm afraid you have an up-hill road before you, my boy. I've been hard at it for twenty years, and I'm not rich yet." Suppose you enter my store. I cannot pay you very well till you learn the business, but it will be a start."

"Oh, Mr. Burnaud!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilton, in gratitude. "How can we ever thank you enough?"

Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm much obliged," he said, "but it's too slow a way. I'm going to get even with that Simon Slink, and I don't want to be all my life about it."

The boy's eyes flashed. He was in solid earnest now.

"But what do you want to do?"

"I don't know. Something. I'm going in for chances."

"That is a very poor opening." Mr. Burnaud shook his head.

"That depends," answered Roger, resolutely. "Folks go out West, or down South, and get rich. I don't see why they can't get rich staying at home. Here's New York with more than a million of people, and oceans of money. I've been thinking, sir, and I've took the notion that there ought to be better chances here than out in the wilds."

Mr. Burnaud looked at the hopeful lad as if he was taking his measure.

"There's one thing you forget, Roger," he said. "There is more money here, it is true, but there are more hands grasping for it. Out in the wilds you've only got nature, and cattle, and dumb-heads to deal with. Here you've got a city of sharpers. It don't take much brains to make money out of sheep and cattle, but a chap has got to be all brains if he wants to get rich fast here."

"I know that," answered Roger, confidently. "That's the reason I want to try it here."

"Oh! So you are all brains, then?"

"I'm not a fool, anyhow. I calculate I'm wide awake. I don't know what's in me, for I've never been tried. But I'm worth trying. Mr. Burnaud. If I find I haven't got the stuff in me to sail up, why then I can come into your store and begin to crawl up."

The experienced man of business looked at the enthusiastic boy with an odd expression. It seemed as if he did not know just what to make of him. He ran his fingers doubtfully through his hair.

"You have an idea, it seems?"

"Not much of a one. But I've been around a bit, and I've had my eyes open. I ain't altogether green, Mr. Burnaud. I've seen some chances already, sir, that I couldn't take because I had no money."

"So you've found that out, eh? You can't do business without capital. I see you're not quite a fool. Now how much would you like for a nest egg?"

"I don't know. I might do something with five dollars."

"Whew! You're mild in your ideas. See here, Roger. I'll give you a chance. I want to see what those boasted brains of yours are worth. Here's a ten-dollar bill. It's a loan, mind. You're to pay it back. I am not going to make a beggar of you. And if you lose it you've got to work it out. I am going to put you on your mettle, my boy."

Roger took the money with a countenance that shone with joy.

"I ain't going to lose it, sir. You see if I don't pay it back."

He began to button his coat and look round for his hat.

"Hey! Where away now in such a hurry?"

"I might lose a chance while I'm talking here," answered Roger, quietly.

"Oh, Roger!" exclaimed the anxious mother, who had been listening intently to this dialogue. "I am afraid to let you risk Mr. Burnaud's money. If you should lose it we could never pay it back." What in the world are you thinking of doing?"

"Of getting even with Simon Slink," answered Roger, with set lips, as he continued to button his coat.

Mr. Burnaud made a sign to the mother behind Roger's back.

"Come, come, we'll have to give the boy his swing," he said. "I expect to have him in my store in a day or two, but we must first let him try those famous ideas."

Roger turned quickly toward him, as if about to give some sharp answer. But he saw a peculiar smile on Mr. Burnaud's lips that checked him. He seized his hat and ran to the door with a very red face.

"I'm going to hammer the iron while it's hot, anyhow," he cried, as he ran hastily out.

Mrs. Wilton turned anxiously to her visitor, who was still smiling.

"What did you give him that money for?" she asked abruptly. "He will be sure to lose it, and we owe you too much now."

"Don't fear, Mrs. Wilton. The money will not be lost."

"I am sure it will. Why, Roger is only a school-boy. He knows nothing about business."

"I am not so sure of that. I wouldn't be surprised if the lad opened our eyes yet. He's got pluck and grit, Mrs. Wilton, and they tell in the battle of life. I can see he is as sharp as a steel-trap and is business to the backbone. There is no dawdling about him. No chances will slide by that boy. Did you see the prompt way in which he struck out for business, and the look he wore? I begin to have faith in Roger. He will be a rich man yet."

"But you doubted him yourself."

"Oh, that was to put him on his mettle. He is vexed at me now, and is bent to show me what he can do. I'll have to keep up that tone. It will spur our young knight on."

"But what in the world is he going to do?"

"I don't know. I don't believe he does himself. But if he sees a chance to turn a penny, he'll turn it. Take my word for that."

As they talked Roger was making his way through the New York streets at a rapid pace. Just where he was going or what he was going to do he had a very faint idea. But he kept his eyes wide open. Not an object or a face escaped him. He had started out to make his fortune, and was on the lookout for chances. And he was bound to show Mr. Burnaud that he was not a conceited braggart.

As he went he kept a hand on the pocket that held the precious ten dollars. It was far more money than he had ever possessed before, and it felt to him as if he was carrying a ton weight. He was rich already in his young fancy.

Ere long he found himself on the North River wharves. Here he walked slowly along looking and listening. What specially took his attention were certain market-boats which had come down the Hudson laden with trucks. He had a dim notion that there might be money here.

On the deck of one small boat stood two men, who were busily conversing. Near them on the deck lay a heap of empty baskets and several barrels.

Roger leaned against a post and looked around him. He had no special object in view, yet he felt that there was no harm in hearing what they had to say.

One of the men was speaking in an angry tone.

"Just like you, Jake," he said. "You are always forgetting something. Your head never saves your heels. Clark & Sons would have given you six dollars a barrel for those apples without a word. They are the first pippins in the market, and all sound. Now, through your dumbness, we've got to hurry them off to the truckers, and they won't give us four."

"I had too many things to think of," rejoined Jake, in apology. "Let me go back. It is only up to Broadway and Grand. I can be there and back in less than an hour."

"It will be three or four hours before they send for them, examine, and pay for them. Everything else is out, and we must be off up the river. Go look up some trucker. We must

rush them off for what they will bring. I can't be kept here all day, just for two barrels of apples."

Jake turned growling away. He was evidently out of temper at the scolding he had received.

All this had not taken two minutes, but in that two minutes Roger had made up his mind. Here was the very chance he had come out to seek.

He left the shelter of his post, walked to the wharf side, and jumped briskly to the deck of the vessel.

"Heard you say something about apples, captain," he briskly remarked. "I'm in on apples. How many have you got, and what brand?"

"Two barrels. Newtown pippins. Prime. The first in market.—Hold up there, Jake, a minute."

Jake, who had stepped to the wharf, turned back.

"What are they worth?"

"Six dollars."

"For the two?"

"Well, not much," laughed the captain.

"What do you take me for, young man?"

"I'll give you six dollars for the two, without opening," said Roger, quietly.

"No you won't, my sharp youth. Go ahead, Jake."

"What is your lowest figure?"

"Take them for five each. That's dog cheap."

"I'll give three and a half, spot cash. There's not a man on the street will give a cent more."

"Why, you young sharp, I could get six dollars a piece for fifty barrels, if I had them and had time to wait."

"But you haven't them and haven't time to wait. Roll them ashore and here's seven dollars planked down."

"Four and a half," said the captain, firmly.

"Three and a half," offered Roger.

"Go ahead, Jake. I can't chaffer here all day."

"There's not a trucker on the street will give you four dollars. I'm up on apples, I tell you. Here's a ten-dollar bill. Give me three dollars change, and roll them ashore."

"I'll give you two dollars change, and then they're given away."

"Not much. Make it two and a half. That splits the difference, and it's the last word. Come, Cap. Is it nail the bargain, or is it slide?"

Roger put one foot on the wharf log. The captain took off his hat and scratched his head doubtfully.

"I hate to give things away. But I'll be shot if I can hang here all day for the sake of a half dollar. Hand over the cash. Roll them ashore, Jake."

In five minutes Roger was the owner of two dollars and a half in cash, and two barrels of apples, which stood on the wharf, while the captain and his assistant were throwing off the lines that held their vessel to the wharf.

It was Roger's first venture in business. He stood looking at his goods with a queer expression. But there was no doubt in his mind as to the contents of the barrels. The private conversation he had heard made him sure it was all right.

After a minute's hesitancy he sought the wharf-keeper.

"Will you keep an eye on those two barrels?" he asked. "I will send for them in an hour or two."

"How do I know they are yours? Where's your bill of sale?"

Here was something Roger had not thought of. The small craft had already left the wharf, and was gliding out into the stream. Roger hailed it.

"Hey, captain," he cried. "Tell this gentleman that these goods are mine."

"That's O. K.," answered the captain.

"They're yours, sure pop."

This answer satisfied the guardian, and Roger left the wharf at a quick step.

He had his market in his eye. Clark & Sons of Broadway and Grand streets, would give six dollars a barrel for them. So he had heard. Within a half-hour he was at that locality.

It took him some little time to find the place. Then he discovered the name on the sign-board of a first-class fruit store. With a little sinking of the heart Roger entered. Suppose he had been cheated? He knew nothing about prices. But he was fairly in for it now. He walked boldly forward.

"Mr. Clark?" responded a sharp-looking business man in answer to his question. "I am Mr. Clark. What can I do for you?"

"I have two barrels of prime apples at the wharf. First chop. Just the stuff for your sales."

Roger talked as if he had been ten years in the trade.

"Apples, eh? How's our stock, Jones?"

"Low," answered the man addressed.

"What are they?"

"Newtown pippins. All sound and prime. The first of that brand in the market."

"That's so. I haven't seen any." Roger's apples went up fifty cents in price at that answer. "What do you want for them?"

"Six-fifty a barrel."

"Nonsense. They are not worth more than five at the utmost."

"They are not nubbins," answered Roger, with a show of indignation. "I can get six from fifty men. There have been no such apples in the market yet. Say six, and they are yours."

"See here, boy, you're a sharp dealer for one of your age. It's a bargain, if the apples turn out as you say."

"If they don't it's no sale," answered Roger, confidently.

In an hour afterward the apples were in the store.

Our youthful merchant waited with some anxiety for the inspection of the fruit. It was not impossible that the waterman had seen him by the post, and got up this conversation as a guy to cheat him. He well knew, as Mr. Burnaud had said, that the great city was full of sharpers.

It was, therefore, with genuine relief that he saw the first barrel opened, and beheld its contents to be large, round, ripe fruit, that looked juicy and luscious.

"I told you they were A 1," he remarked, confidently.

"Why they're not bad, that's a fact."

The second barrel opened out as well.

"Come back to the office."

Roger walked back with as independent an air as if he owned the store, though his heart was beating high with excitement.

In a few minutes he had twelve dollars, in crisp new bills, in his pocket, in exchange for his apples.

"Call on me if you have any more goods to sell," said Mr. Clark.

"Thank you. I won't forget," answered Roger, politely, as he left the store.

But though the boy's face was quiet his heart was full of joy and hope. He had not been three hours at work and had already made four-and-a-half dollars profit on his capital. He felt at that moment that he was on the high road to fortune.

"The day is young yet," said Roger, looking around. "I don't suppose I'll find any more angels like them, but I can't afford to let the grass grow under my feet. Ten hours is a day's work in my almanac."

When he went home that night he had managed to add fifty cents more to his capital. He was five dollars richer than when he set out to make his fortune.

CHAPTER IV.

NEW LINES OF TRADE.

ROGER kept his first day's success to himself. He did not wish to raise false expectations. He very well knew that it might be followed by failure. It was no pathway of roses that lay before him, but a track paved with thorns, and it was not every one that could travel it in safety.

"I didn't do bad, mother," he admitted. "But I won't brag. Wait till I've tried it a week, and then we'll see what's in it."

He was out bright and early the next morning. All day long he traversed the wharves and the streets, wide awake for chances, yet when night came on he had put but twenty cents in his pocket, ten for holding a gentleman's horse, and ten for carrying an old lady's parcel.

He felt decidedly blue as he made his way slowly home.

"Lucky I didn't brag last night," he said to himself, "or I might have to back water to-night. But it isn't all lost that's in danger. I've seen plenty of chances when I had no capital. Keep up a good heart, Roger. The world's young yet."

He paused. A personage before him was in trouble. It was an itinerant street merchant, who had stumbled and upset his kit of goods. They seemed to be composed of imitation jewelry, and had rolled far and wide.

"Hold your own, my hearty!" cried Roger,

cheerily. "Away goes your stock in trade. Come, I'll help you pick them up!"

He set briskly to work, gathering the bits of shining glass and imitation gold and gems, which glittered in the light of the street lamp. The unlucky peddler did the same thing, but with a sharp eye on his volunteer assistant. He wanted to be sure that none of his ten-cent diamonds went into the boy's pockets.

But Roger had not a thought of dishonesty. He was not out on the world to make his fortune by theft.

"There you are," he said, cheerily, as he poured his findings into the tray. "I guess that's all. Look out sharper for your toes next time."

"Much obliged," answered the peddler, gratefully. "You're a square young hoss. I calculate I owe you something for your trouble."

He took a piece of silver from his pocket and pressed it on Roger.

"I won't take it," declared the latter. "You don't make enough to afford to give away your profits."

"Don't I?" said the man, laughing. "That's more than you know about it. There's a big profit in these things, my boy. Why, I've made three dollars clear to-day."

"Three dollars!" echoed Roger, opening his eyes wide.

"Hope you don't think we walk round selling things for fun? Not much! There's one chap I know, who sells toilet soaps, that thinks nothing of five dollars a day. He's a good talker, of course. I don't mind telling you this, my boy, as long as you helped me. Are you in any business?"

"I'm open for any paying line," answered Roger.

"Come along, then. I rather like you, and will let you into a secret or two."

He led the way, busily talking. By the time they had advanced four or five blocks Roger had learned a good many things of which he had not dreamed before.

If he had not put much in his pocket that day, he had put something in his head, and he felt that his day's profits were quite up to those of the day before.

For the next two days the young merchant put into effect the lessons he had learned. He had been taught where to get his goods, and how to handle them, and he proved an apt scholar.

The first day he handled soap. The next day he took out a patent window-fastener, that paid a heavy profit. At the end of the second day he found that he had added eight dollars to his capital. But this money had not been earned without active industry and an immense amount of talk.

"I wouldn't want to keep that up long," the boy said to himself. "It pays, but it is wearing. Just wait till I get some cash ahead, and see if I don't go into something bigger."

More than a week passed before Mr. Burnaud showed himself again at the home of the Wiltons. It was morning. Roger was sitting with his hat in his hand, on the point of going out.

Mr. Burnaud looked at him with a quizzical smile.

"How now, Roger?" he remarked pleasantly.

"Are you ready to give up your wild ways and come into the store? I want a boy of your size, and am holding the place open."

"We ought to be forever obliged to you!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilton. "Of course he will come, sir. It is ridiculous for him to think of anything else."

"Not just yet, mother. Mr. Burnaud didn't say he was in any hurry. I'm very much obliged, I'm sure, but it's too slow a way to work out what I owe him at a store boy's wages."

"Mercy! You haven't lost the money?"

"He will have to work it out yet," said the merchant, with a sly wink. "Let him have his swing. I will keep the place open."

Roger grew red in the face. He thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a ten-dollar bill.

"Here it is, Mr. Burnaud. I thank you ever so much for the loan. But I don't need it any longer."

"Come, come, Roger; you are not angry, I hope. I was only joking."

"I'd like to pay you back what you've been so kind as to lend my mother," continued the boy, stolidly. "But I hope you will wait a little longer, until I get something ahead."

"Why, you young jackanapes! what are you driving at? You don't want to hint that you've got a capital of your own already?"

"I have made a little," answered Roger, mod-

estly. "I've had your money for a whole week, Mr. Burnaud, and I haven't spent that time counting my fingers."

He drew some more money from his pocket and spread it out before the eyes of the merchant.

"Twenty dollars! whew!" The gentleman gave a long whistle.

"Twenty dollars? You don't mean to say that my Roger has made twenty dollars in a week? And the ungrateful fellow has never told me a word of it!"

The happy mother flung her arms around her son's neck, and kissed him fondly.

"But what have you been doing, my good fellow?" asked Mr. Burnaud. "You have not been operating in Wall street?"

"I have been working," answered Roger, quietly. "If you care to hear I'll tell you all about it."

Very briefly and modestly he told the story of his week's labor, from the apple episode to the peddling.

"You'll do," exclaimed Mr. Burnaud, clapping him heartily on the shoulder. "See here, Roger, that place in my store is closed. I will hire another boy to-day."

"Oh, Mr. Burnaud, I hope you won't!" cried the widow. "Roger will never get along at what he is at now. I'd much rather he would be at something regular."

"Well, well, Roger, it rests with you. What do you say?"

"Can I sell you a half-dozen of fine shirts?" asked Roger, with a queer smile. "I can offer you a splendid article, twenty-thread-fine Irish linen, triple bosom, well made, and the lowest figure in the market. I've got inside trade figures, and can put them to you low."

"Shirts! The deuce! What are you at now?"

"I made a contract last night with Greg & Sons. Want to put out not less than two dozen to-morrow. Shall I book your order for a half-dozen?"

Mr. Burnaud burst into a hearty laugh. He seemed highly tickled at Roger's business-like tone.

"I never buy a pig in a bag," he answered, gravely. "Show me your samples, give me your figures, and then we will talk."

"That's business. I will see you early to-morrow," answered Roger, making a note in his memorandum-book. "There's money in those shirts, Mr. Burnaud. I don't mind telling you that. And they'll go like hot cakes. Just you see if I don't swing them off lively."

Roger meant business. Before ten o'clock the next morning he was in Mr. Burnaud's store, with his samples of fine dress shirts neatly done up in a linen case, which he had but to throw open to display his goods.

The merchant met him gravely, and with the air of a stranger.

"Well, young man, do you wish to see me this morning?"

"Yes, sir," answered Roger, at once taking his cue. "If you have ten minutes to spare, I would like to show you something nice. You'll find you haven't wasted your time."

He began to open his parcel.

"What! You're another of those confounded peddlers, that take up half my time? Come, come, I have no spare minutes to waste on that. I am not on the buy."

"But just look. I don't ask you to buy. But I know it will do you good to see my samples."

"I don't want to see your goods. I see oceans of goods every day. Come, pack, young man; I haven't time to listen to you."

"Is business brisk just now, Mr. Burnaud?" asked Roger, subsiding into a chair.

"No. It is confoundedly dull."

Mr. Burnaud was watching the boy curiously from the corner of his eye.

Roger seemed to quite forget his object in entering the store. He talked quite glibly for ten minutes on other subjects. Then he got up as if to leave.

"You've got something to sell?"

"Yes. But I don't wish to annoy you."

"Let me see it, anyhow. That will do no harm."

In a minute Roger had his case open, and was displaying his samples.

"Did you ever see a finer piece of Irish linen than that? And see here! Look how they are made."

Ten minutes more talk, in which Mr. Burnaud made all sorts of objections, which Roger skillfully parried, with a quickness and wit that secretly delighted the merchant. Then Roger booked his order for a half-dozen shirts, to be delivered in three days.

Roger did up his case, and turned to go. "You'll do, my boy," said Mr. Burnaud, with a sudden change from his business-like tone. "I can see that you are a born salesman. You'll find all sorts of people, and will have to handle them in all sorts of ways. But you can do it. That position in my store is no longer open."

"I'd take it," answered Roger quietly. "Only I'm going for Simon Slink. It isn't money I want as much as I do satisfaction. The old miser bundled my mother into the street, without pity or mercy. Just wait! I won't forget what I owe him!"

Yet he drove this shadow of revenge out of sight as he plunged again into business. Before night he had been in at least a hundred places of business. In some of them he was treated rudely, in some politely, and not one person out of twenty was ready to buy.

But his last week's experience at peddling had taught him that it was no rose-water business. If he was going to be depressed by a rebuff he might as well give up at once.

But Roger was not of that sort. He had made up his mind to let nothing check him, and before night, by dint of abundant talk, he had taken orders for three dozen shirts.

By the end of the week he had sold and delivered eight dozen, at a profit of twenty-five cents each, and was just twenty-four dollars richer.

"Shirts pay, mother," he said, on counting out his fund before Mrs. Wilton's delighted eyes. "They do very well for a beginning, but I haven't hit the mark yet. There's bigger chances in the market than peddling, and I'm bound to go for them. Just wait till I get a solid capital. And, mind you, I'm not going to forget Simon Slink. It was very dark that day he turned us into the street, mother. But the sun is beginning to shine."

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE DESK.

A MONTH had passed since Roger Wilton went out to seek his fortune. Yet in that month he seemed to have grown ten years older. This sharp-eyed, clear-spoken, earnest and energetic fellow could not have been recognized for the heedless school-boy of a few months before. Then, partly spoiled by his education, he had about made up his mind to be a gentleman. Now he was a man of business, from the heart to the fingers' ends.

It was that one eventful minute in his life, in which he had seen his mother seated sadly amid her discarded furniture, and the heartless landlord insulting her, that had wrought this change. It had given him a strong motive in life. It was not a very noble sentiment, the thirst for revenge. And yet no son had sounder reasons for it.

"I tell you I'm going to get rich, mother," he said, positively. "I know I ain't getting along very fast, but just wait. Anyhow I've got twenty dollars, and I've paid everything, rent and all. And I've paid Mr. Burnaud the money he lent you."

"You have, Roger?" exclaimed Mrs. Wilton, with a show of great relief.

"He didn't want to take it, but I made him," answered the independent boy. "I thought, somehow, you'd sooner not owe him."

"That is right, my son; I don't want to owe anybody."

"There is only one debt left. And that can wait till I get some more cash."

"What debt is that?" asked Mrs. Wilton, in surprise.

"We owe Simon Slink two weeks' rent. I am going to pay that next."

"Pay that?" she cried, indignantly. "Don't you think of such a thing! What, after the way he treated us? I'd put him up with paying him, the grasping old rascal!"

"We owe him, and he's got to be paid," rejoined Roger, with a peculiar smile. "I believe in making a square beginning. I don't want old Slink, the day I bring him down to his marrow-bones, to throw in my teeth that we cheated him out of two weeks' rent. I'm proud enough to want to begin with a clean record."

"Dear me, you are not still harping on that notion? I wish you'd forget all about Simon Slink. He can't do us any more harm now. Leave him to his own conscience."

"He hasn't any," answered Roger, positively. "I ain't going to forget, mother, that after we paid him rent for ten years, and after father worked for him that long at low wages, he set us out of doors for two weeks' rent. And what is more he wouldn't give you an hour's grace. When I came back from Mr. Burnaud I found

you sitting out in the cold, and the rain ready to fall, and that old villain glowering over you. Don't ask me to forget. I'd have to die first."

"I wouldn't feel it so bad only for one thing," replied Mrs. Wilton. "He did insult me shamefully about your father's desk. I begged him to let that alone, but he picked it up and flung it into the street so hard that he burst it open. That is one thing I can't easily forgive."

"Where is that desk?" asked Roger. "I haven't seen it since we've been here."

"I put it away until it could be mended," rejoined Mrs. Wilton. "Here it is, Roger."

She unlocked a bureau drawer, and drew out the desk on which she set such store.

It was a handsomely-carved walnut writing-desk, inlaid with some rich foreign wood. It still gaped slightly at the bottom, where it had cracked open under Simon Slink's rough treatment. The corner of a folded white paper slightly protruded at the crack.

"Are those papers of any value?" asked Roger.

"Oh, no! They are mostly old bills and receipts, and some of your father's business contracts. I will show you them, since you are now becoming the head of the family."

She smiled fondly on her son as she inserted the key, and opened the desk.

"You see," she remarked, thrusting in her hand, and lifting a loose bundle of papers.

Roger looked carelessly on, with no great show of interest in the matter.

But suddenly he started, and a look of surprise came on his face. He quickly drew out the few papers which remained in the bottom of the desk.

"I don't understand that," he exclaimed, in a puzzled tone. "That is certainly very queer."

"What do you mean, Roger?" demanded his mother, in astonishment.

"Why, don't you see? The desk is empty, and yet that paper is still there at the crack. How did it get there? There is nothing inside. Has the desk a false bottom?"

"Nonsense, no! I never heard of such a thing."

"Papers don't come out of solid wood," answered the boy. "There's something here wants looking into. Who knows but what our fortune is hidden in this desk?"

He took hold of the protruding corner of the paper, and tried to pull it out. But the crack was not wide enough to let it come.

"Not much of a fortune, I fancy," laughed Mrs. Wilton. "My husband had no gold-mine stock. Yet you have certainly roused my curiosity."

While she spoke Roger was peering into the desk. The bottom was smooth and polished, with nothing to indicate that it was movable. He tapped and pressed it at various points, but it failed to yield.

The youthful investigator was growing deeply interested. He opened the large blade of his pocket-knife and inserted it at the crack.

"There is a hollow plane there, anyhow," he muttered.

He pressed upward. The blade came against something solid, but there was no yielding.

"Look underneath," suggested Mrs. Wilton, who had grown excited and eager.

He did so, turning the box upside down. The bottom was less carefully finished than the other portions. Yet it was sound and solid, except a minute crack near one side.

Hardly knowing why he did so, Roger inserted the fine point of his knife-blade into this crack and pushed it upward.

There followed a faint click, that sounded remarkably loud to his strained ears. Something seemed to give way. Cautiously turning the desk right-side up he saw that the seeming bottom had moved and slipped down at one side. There was a crack between it and the side of the box.

By using the flat blade of a table-knife he managed to lift the thin wood, which now readily yielded.

To Mrs. Wilton's utter surprise it proved to be indeed a false bottom.

"Well, I never!" she loudly exclaimed, lifting her hands in wonder. "And to think that Jacob never told me of it! I never had such a start in my life! And just look! It is full of papers!"

Roger, without speaking, was busily engaged in emptying the desk of these secretly hidden papers. He felt that they must be important to be so carefully concealed.

"This is not paper," he declared. "It is parchment. And people don't use parchment for trifling matters."

His hands involuntarily trembled as he opened the documents.

"Last Will and Testament!" he read. "Deed! Bond and Warrant." Good gracious, mother, what does it all mean?"

"To think of Jacob hiding those papers, and I never to know of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilton, who could not get this idea out of her head.

"Likely he had his reasons," answered Roger.

"But, that's not the question now. What are these papers? Whom do they belong to? How came father to have them? It's the queerest thing out. Why, mother, this will bequeaths a hundred thousand dollars to the infant son of Albert Homer. And these other papers all refer to property belonging to Albert Homer. I wish Mr. Burnaud was here. He might understand them."

"You have dropped something, Roger," said Mrs. Wilton, as she stooped to pick up a paper which had fallen to the floor.

It proved to be an envelope, addressed "To my Wife and Son."

Mrs. Wilton was on the point of tearing it eagerly open. But she hesitated, and her face grew slightly pale.

"What can it mean?" she whispered. "I hope my husband has done no wrong deed which he has kept concealed from me. You open it, Roger. I am afraid."

"My father never did anything to be ashamed of. I know that!" rejoined Roger. "He wasn't that sort."

In a moment he had opened the envelope, and extracted from it a closely-written letter, which bore the same address as the envelope.

"Read it, Roger. Quick! I was never so excited in my life. To think of such a mystery; and me never to dream of it!"

Roger smiled, as he unfolded the letter. He read it with curious interest, which grew more and more eager as he went on. It ran as follows:

"TO MY WIFE AND SON:—

"To your hands I leave the task which I have died without fulfilling. I have prepared this letter, in case death should overtake me, and my work be unaccomplished. I have concealed these papers, and mentioned their existence to nobody. I have even had a false bottom put in my desk, for the purpose of securely concealing them. I have taken these precautions, as I know the character of the man with whom I have to deal. Should a word come to his ear that I possess these documents, I would be ruined. He is a ruthless enemy who would never forgive me for what I have done."

"This enemy is Simon Slink, my employer; hate him, though I am obliged to take his money in wages. He has made my life a bitter one, and I would give years of it for revenge on this soulless knave. Let me once find Edward Homer, the mysterious owner of the property here represented, and I will gain retribution for my many wrongs."

"If I should die before my quest is accomplished I leave this task to you, my wife and son. And first, to advise you how I became possessed of these important documents. It was done by rescuing them from the flames, to which Simon Slink had devoted them. I had been absent on an errand. I entered the office on my return. It was empty. But in the stove was a heap of papers which were burning. They had been thrust in and set on fire, and the old villain had been called out before they were half burnt."

"I had long been doubtful of his practices, and I quickly rescued from the stove this bundle of papers, which were tied up together. Before I could look further I heard his steps approaching. I hastily withdrew, by another door. I saw him hurriedly enter and eagerly approach the stove, rubbing his hands with fiendish glee, as he saw the flames ascending. But suddenly his face changed. He poked among the papers. He had missed those I had taken. His cadaverous face grew deathly pale. His eyes protruded with fright. His knees shook with terror. A howl of affright came from his lips. After a moment of stupefaction he turned and rushed to the door by which he had entered."

"I instantly left the keyhole by which I had been observing him, and hastened away. Fortunately I escaped his observation and got safely away with my prize. It consisted of the documents which are now in your hands."

"It was a half-hour before I again entered the office. I was trembling at heart, but steady of face. I think I concealed every trace of inner excitement."

"Simon Slink's behavior aided me to keep calm. He asked me no questions. Yet he watched me with hawk-like eyes. I could see that he was dreadfully disturbed, though he strove to hide it. It was months before he ceased to watch me with suspicion. I fancy he has had spies on my footsteps. Yet he has learned nothing. I have been too cautious to be caught. Yet ever since that day the old villain has been like a man with an avalanche impending above him, and threatening to fall and crush him. I can see the shadow of terror in his eyes."

"And yet I am utterly in the dark. I have, for the past six years, made every possible effort to discover the Edward Homer to whom these papers

belong, but all in vain. If such a person exists he is beyond the reach of the cautious inquiry which I have made.

"You will ask what these papers mean. I cannot tell you. But I have my suspicions. Simon Slink has other business than that of note-broker and speculator. He is President of the Royal Insurance and Trust Company. This company receives in trust the property of orphans and others. It holds many unsettled estates. I have some reason to think that, as president, he has handled trust funds for his own use. He has always been lucky enough to be able to return the money in time. But here is a case where the heir seems to have disappeared, or where he has been disposed of. The trust remains in the hands of the company. But Simon Slink holds nearly all the stock of the company, and it is my firm belief that he has stolen this unclaimed estate, and sought to destroy the papers.

"So I judge his actions. If I could but find Edward Homer, and put him on the track of his property, I would have revenge at last for the cruel way in which this man has treated me. If I die unrevenged, I leave it to you to keep up the search. The robber of the widow and orphan and the oppressor of the poor, cannot forever triumph in his villainy. Providence will some day bring retribution on his head."

JACOB WILTON."

The mother and son sat looking at one another with distended eyes.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed the good lady.

"He intended to give us this," said Roger reflectively. "He died suddenly, you know, and was long insensible."

"That is true," answered his mother. "And think, Roger, the secret might never have been discovered if Simon Slink had not flung out this desk so hard as to split it open. It looks as if Providence was already at work."

"In trying to oppress and insult the widow, he may have ruined himself," rejoined Roger, solemnly. "I will take up the task in which father failed. I have now my father, my mother and myself to revenge on Simon Slink."

"Beware, my son. He is a dangerous foe."

"So am I, when I get started. And I reckon old Slink will find that out before I am done with him."

CHAPTER VI.

A BARGAIN IN SHIRTS AND OYSTERS.

"SEE here, Wilton, you're a chap that's alive for a bargain. Now I'm going to give you a prime chance to make a stake."

These words were spoken by a prominent shirt manufacturer to Roger, who had stepped into his establishment to fill some orders.

"I'm open for chances," answered the boy speculator, briskly. "Say the word. If there is cash in it, and it is not too heavy, I'm your lad."

"Look at that pile of goods. You know what they are, for you have sold them. I want to close out the lot. I am about to make a change in the collar, and want to get rid of my old stock. You can have them at a bargain."

Roger was already examining the shirts, with an experienced eye.

"How many are there?"

"A hundred dozen. Take the lot, and I will close them out for six dollars the dozen."

"Six hundred dollars!" cried Roger, with a loud whistle. "You must think I am made of money. I'll take ten dozen at that figure."

"No you won't. I won't sell a shirt less than the lot at that price. It don't more than pay me for the linen, but I want to get rid of them."

Roger looked at them with wistful eyes. He knew that he could retail them like hot cakes at a dollar apiece. He sighed as he turned away.

"Wish I could," he remarked sadly. "But I haven't the cash."

The manufacturer looked at him earnestly.

"Look here, Wilton," he exclaimed. "You're a straight and an honorable fellow, and I like you. Pay me one hundred dollars down and the goods are yours. You can leave them here as security for the balance, and pay as you sell them. I wouldn't do that for everybody, but I want to give you a show."

Roger stood reflecting. It was a big chance, but his total capital amounted to thirty dollars. His thoughts turned to Mr. Burnaud. Would he lend him the balance?

"It is the bold that win," he said to himself.

"I will try it."

He turned to the manufacturer with a resolute face.

"Make out the bill," he said. "Receipt it for one hundred on account. I will be back in an hour."

"If you don't come?"

"Then the sale is off," declared Roger.

"I will give you two," rejoined the good-natured manufacturer. "You have the refusal of the goods till three o'clock."

"Thank you."

Roger was off like a flash. There was no time now for words. He could double his money on the goods, and then sell them below the retail market price.

With a strongly-beating heart and an excited brain he hurried at all speed to Mr. Burnaud's store. To his utter alarm he was told that that gentleman was out, and would not be in for two hours.

Roger turned away with a face so fallen and woe-begone that the confidential clerk, to whom he had been speaking, stopped him.

"What is the matter, my boy?" he asked, in a kindly tone. "Is anything wrong? Perhaps I can help you."

"No, sir," answered Roger. "The fact is, I wanted to borrow some money from Mr. Burnaud. I will have to do without it."

"But he may be back in two hours."

"That will be too late."

His tone was so sorrowful that the clerk felt pity for him.

"Is there nowhere else you can raise it?" he asked. "I am afraid Mr. Burnaud could not help you to-day. Money is very tight, and he is out on a collecting tour."

"It was only a little speculation," answered Roger. "I will have to give it up. Good-day, sir. I will stop in again. He may be back in time."

He bowed himself out of the office, sadly disappointed. It was the first serious set-back he had yet had in his business career.

But the touch of the fresh out-door air brought back some of Roger's old hopeful spirit.

"A chap can't lose what he never had," he said to himself. "It's one chance gone, but there are plenty others. Guess I'll drop in somewhere and get my dinner. Mr. Burnaud may be back by that time."

The restaurant in which he stopped was one that did a very large oyster business. It was noted, indeed, as keeping the best oysters in town, and was a favorite place of resort for lovers of the bivalves.

He found the tables well filled on entering, and pushed his way back, not being in the mood just then for company.

He succeeded in finding a table without guests in an inconvenient corner of the saloon, close to a thin board partition that shut off the rear offices from the main body of the room.

Calling for a simple dinner he devoted himself to its enjoyment, and strove to drive from his mind all memory of his business disappointment.

As he sat there, he heard various sounds from behind the partition, to which he was so close as almost to touch it.

A person seemed to be eating his dinner on the other side of the partition, not three feet distant from Roger.

After several minutes the boy heard another person enter, and seat himself. A conversation at once commenced, in a low tone, yet every word audible to the involuntary listener.

"The Mary Ann is in," he heard. "Jones has just telephoned me. She is drawing into dock, and will be tied up to the wharf in ten minutes. You had best strike down at once, Joe. It is the first load of Farmer's Bay primes yet in the market, and we must secure the whole lot."

"At what figure?" asked Joe, who seemed to be busily eating.

"Six dollars may bring them, if you are wide-awake and take the whole cargo in a lump. But pay seven rather than lose them."

"Seven is the limit?"

"Yes. What we don't need ourselves we can put on the market at seven-fifty."

"And what is the limit in number?"

"Take the whole cargo. Up to fifty thousand."

"All right. Where is the boat?"

"At Prince street wharf. Captain Collins. Hurry up, Joe. Every minute counts. You don't want that dumpling."

"It's queer if I don't. Never wind up my dinner without a dumpling. But that won't take me long. Cash is the word, I suppose."

"Yes. If he asks it."

Not a word of this conversation had escaped Roger's ears. As it went on he ceased eating, and devoted himself to listening. He grew more and more excited.

A host of thoughts crowded into his mind.

"I'll do it," he said, resolutely. "Boldness wins. A man can't make a fortune if he is afraid of a risk."

In a moment he was up and making his way to the counter, where he paid for his frugal dinner. While doing so he kept an eye on the

rear end of the saloon. He was hoping that Joe would take his time in swallowing that dumpling.

Just as he was turning away two men came through a door in the partition. One of them was hatless. The other, a red-whiskered and red-faced man, was wiping his mouth with his hand, and putting on his hat.

"That's Joe," said Roger to himself. "Glad I saw him. But every minute counts now. Joe's death on putting down dumplings, I'll vouch for that."

He hurried from the saloon. It had been his intention to hasten to the Elevated Railroad; but the sight of a passing cab changed his ideas. He hailed the cabman.

"Take me to Prince street wharf at double speed," he said. "Make the distance in ten minutes, and I'll pay you a dollar."

"Say fifteen," answered the cabman. "It can't be done in less."

"All right. But do your prettiest."

The next minute the carriage was driving rapidly forward. It was the first time in his life that Roger had been in a private vehicle, and he lay back against the cushions with great satisfaction. But he was too anxious to fully enjoy his ride. A minute more or less might spoil all the brilliant plans which were running through his active young mind.

"Stir up," he cried to the driver. "You've got to earn that dollar, or you won't get it."

The cab went on at a mad pace, dashing around corners, and whirling through cross streets. Yet the promised fifteen minutes seemed to the eager boy to stretch out to an hour.

Finally it drew up with a sudden jerk.

"Here you are," cried the cabman.

"You are behind time," answered Roger sourly, as he jumped out.

"Not much I am. I am two minutes ahead of time."

He consulted his watch.

"Here's your money, then. You needn't wait. I'll foot it back."

Roger hurried on to the wharf.

"I've got to earn that dollar back, anyhow," he said to himself.

There were a number of vessels moored to the wharf, but to these he paid no attention, his eyes being directed to a small, sloop-rigged craft, that apparently had just drawn in, for one of its crew was lazily taking an extra turn of a hawser around a wharf post.

Without an instant's hesitation Roger leaped to the deck of the vessel. His feet slipped on the soiled and slimy boards, but he quickly recovered his footing.

"Is this the Mary Ann, Captain Collins?" he asked of one of the crew.

"Yes."

"Where is the captain?"

"Aft there. That man with the sou'-wester."

Roger hastened to the man thus pointed out. He was a rough-faced, weather-beaten specimen. He looked up inquiringly as Roger approached.

"Got a full cargo, Cap?" asked the boy, in a business-like tone.

"Yes. Farmer's Bays. Prime stock, too. Don't know you. Are you in the oyster line?"

"You bet! I'm on the buy, dead sure. How many have you?"

"'Bout fifty thousand, I reckon."

"What do you want for them?"

"What will you give?"

"Six dollars."

"You can't have them."

"That settles it. If you can get more, tell me."

Roger sprang to the wharf.

"Don't be in such a confounded hurry," growled the captain. "I tell you they're worth more."

"Maybe. Tell you what, Cap, I'll take the whole cargo, and pay cash. That's not a bad offer, and you know it. You can unload and be off again for the beds by night. Say the word, yes or no."

The captain looked at the boy and then at the deck. He took off his tarpaulin and scratched his head reflectively. He was evidently in a deep quandary.

"Yes or no. Sharp," cried Roger, briskly. "You've got my best offer. And time's mighty short with me just now."

It was short indeed, for he had caught a glimpse of a red-whiskered man advancing from the next wharf. Calm as the boy seemed he was devoured by anxiety.

"You are rascally spry," grumbled the captain. "Howsomever, I s'pose—"

"What?"

"That maybe I can't do better."
 "That's business. Make me out a bill at once."
 "But I don't know just how many—"
 "Make it fifty thousand. If it's short or over we can settle that afterward."

"Come down to the cabin then,"
 Roger followed his lumbering steps, wild with anxiety at his slowness. The red-whiskered man was already at the head of the wharf.

"There, make out the bill yourself," said the captain, pushing paper toward Roger. "My fist is better at dredging oysters than at writin'. You're a prompt kind of a lad."

"You bet I am," replied Roger, dashing off the bill at double speed.

"Now, sir, sign that," he continued. "That's a receipt for thirty dollars cash, to nail the bargain."

While the captain was carefully reading what Roger had written, and slowly affixing his signature, in a very rough fashion, Roger drew his small capital from his pocket and counted it out on the table. His nervousness was increasing. He could hear a voice on the deck that had a familiar tone to his sharpened ears.

The captain finished his work, and pushed the bill over to Roger.

"Here's your cash. See if it's all right." With joyful haste he grasped the bill, with the thirty dollars receipted on it.

"Ay, ay," declared the captain. "That's square. The cargo's yours. Cash on delivery, of course."

"Of course; two hundred and fifty more on delivery."

"How do you do, Cap?" came a voice from the companionway. "Got a lot of Farmer's Bays, eh? Guess I'll try and relieve you of them."

It was a red-faced man that spoke. He laughed as he descended the stairs.

The captain looked up.
 "Reckon there's a rush on Farmer's Bays, this morning," he declared. "You're a bit late, Joe. I've just sold out the whole cargo to this young man."

"The deuce you have!" cried Joe, with an oath. "Hang it, I wanted them oysters, bad. That confounded dumpling has salted my hash."

"Can't help it," rejoined the captain. "This young gentleman is the owner of them now. You'll have to buy from him if you want them."

Captain Collins ascended to the deck, leaving his two customers together in the cabin. Roger sat silent and self-possessed, fingering his receipted bill with a feeling of inward triumph. He had sold his red-whiskered competitor at a very cheap rate.

The latter looked at him angrily.

"Who are you buying for?" he asked.

"For myself," answered Roger, coolly.

"You're too confounded spry," growled Joe.

"I wanted them oysters."

"Very well," rejoined Roger, quietly. "I am on the make. What will you give for them? Name a satisfactory figure and they are yours."

Joe looked at him closely. He was afraid of catching it when he should report his failure to his employer. Here was a possible opening to redeem himself.

"What did you pay for them?" he asked.

"That's my business. What will you give?"

"Six-fifty, and take the whole lot, cash down."

"I don't believe you will," answered Roger, coolly.

"Then what do you want?"

"Seven dollars. Not a cent less. Mind you, they're as good as gold. You can do as you please. I don't care."

"They are not worth it."

"Very well. I will find somebody that will pay it. Coburn & Co. will take them off my hands without a word."

The cunning rogue had named Joe's employers. The latter looked blue.

"You drive a hard bargain," he declared.

"Seven is your best figure?"

"Yes. I'll give you ten minutes to decide."

"I'll take them," said Joe.

Roger's heart bounded, but his face was impassively cool.

"Very well. I'll sell you my bargain," he rejoined. "Here is my bill. Fifty thousand, at a dollar a thousand profit, makes fifty dollars. Add thirty dollars paid down, and we have eighty. Plank me down eighty, cash, and the oysters are yours."

"Fifty dollars for five minutes' work. Hang me if that ain't sharp practice! You will give me time, anyhow, to see the captain and find if this is all right?"

"Yes."

Everything proved satisfactory. Roger had done his work to the mark. In ten minutes afterward he left the vessel with eighty dollars in his pocket. Joe took good care to have another bill made out by Captain Collins to himself. He did not want his employers to discover that he had paid fifty dollars for Joe's apple dumpling. It was the dearest dumpling that had ever been sold in their establishment.

Roger, with a bounding heart, made his way back at all speed to the shirt manufacturer. It was five minutes to three when he entered the establishment.

His good-natured friend was still there, and looked up with a smile.

"On time, Wilton," he said. "Have you got the cash?"

"Not all," answered Roger. "But I can plank you eighty dollars down and pay the other twenty to-morrow. I hope you'll let me have them, Mr. Cox."

The gentleman smiled at his customer's anxious tone.

"They are yours, Wilton. And, mind you, I want you to run them off as fast as possible. I can't have them here in my way."

"I'll do my best," said Roger modestly.

In a half-hour he left the place with a bill in his pocket for a hundred dozen shirts, at six hundred dollars for the lot, and a receipt for eighty dollars paid on account. We need say nothing of the light heart that throbbed under that bill.

The boy went to work with a will the next day. By offering the shirts at one dollar each they went off rapidly. They were a very cheap article. Within a month, by very hard work, he had disposed of and delivered the whole lot.

Mr. Cox was paid in full, and Roger had six hundred and fifty dollars in his pocket, as profit on his two ventures!

He began to feel now that he was on the high road to fortune in solid earnest.

CHAPTER VII.

SIMON SLINK GETS A START.

SIMON SLINK sat in his office. It was a dusty, upset, spider-webbed sort of a place, that looked as if it had not seen a broom for a year. Papers were scattered on table and floor. There were great ink-stains on the threadbare carpet. The walls were hung with certain maps, so creased and soiled that it was not easy to make them out.

The only piece of substantial furniture in the room was a great iron safe, that occupied one corner and looked strong enough to defy a regiment of burglars. Old Simon did not worry himself about dirt, but he was bound to keep his cash and valuables secure.

He was seated in a rusty leather-backed chair, his sordid face glowing with satisfaction as he bent over a paper on the table before him.

"It's sure," he muttered. "Stock is sixty-seven to-day. That's a clear fifty thousand. Ah, old Slink don't often make mistakes. Give me a year more and I'll have my million. And then I'll stop. Yes, I'll stop then. A million! Aha! then I can snap my fingers at these blind fools that call me miser and money-grubber."

He sat back in his chair and rubbed his skinny hands gleefully together.

"Look at me now!" he said. "And I was once a poor boy, that was kicked and cuffed like a football. But I've had it out on the world. I've pinched 'em. And I'll keep pinching 'em. They call me heartless and cruel. Little I care, so I get their money. I care for nobody but myself. They can all starve for me. Yes, they can all starve!"

He gave this out with a tiger-like growl. Yet immediately afterward a look of anxiety came upon his face.

"Those papers! Those papers!" he uttered with a shudder. "Somebody has them. Who? Who? I would like to tear his heart out if I could find him. I thought it was that dog, Jacob Wilton. But he is dead and gone. He got away from me by dying, the dog. But I have had revenge on him. I have turned his wife and children out of doors. I hope they'll starve. I hope they'll starve, the scum!"

His face was that of a fiend as he hissed out these words.

At that moment a footstep sounded without. The outer door opened and there was a step in the hall. The old fellow straightened himself up with a grin of hope. Here was new fish coming to his net. Somebody with a note to shave, he thought.

Yet the opening door revealed a youthful form, familiar to him, though he could not instantly place him.

It was Roger Wilton. The boy's face was hard and stern, as he fixed his eyes on his enemy with a look that gave the old rogue a start.

"You don't know me, then," said Roger, pausing on the opposite side of the table. "I am Roger Wilton."

Old Slink pushed his chair back in hasty alarm, and laid his hand on a bell as if to call for aid. He feared, in his craven soul, an assault from the boy whom he had so injured.

"Don't be scared," remarked Roger, with a curl of the lip. "I won't lay hands on you. I am not fool enough to give you the advantage of the law. My mother owes you two weeks' rent."

"Yes," faltered the hoary miser. "She owes me ten dollars for rent."

"Write me a bill and receipt for it," said Roger, sternly. "She shall owe you nothing. You shall not say that we took a cent from you."

The old miser looked up with a queer expression. He was divided between dread of his visitor and eager desire for the money. Roger had nearly a man's size and strength, and seemed athletic and powerful.

"I couldn't help it," the old rogue muttered in apology. "I lose ever so much money through bad tenants. I've got to have my rents, or I'd be made a beggar."

"Drop all that," cried Roger, in disgust. "Here's the money. Now give me a receipt in full." He planked down the cash.

Simon, in eager hope of adding to his store this money which he had never dreamed of getting, hastily wrote the required receipt. He passed it over to Roger, and grasped the money with trembling hands.

"You owe me nothing. You owe me nothing now," he eagerly declared. "You are a fine boy—a fine boy."

"But you owe me something," rejoined Roger sternly, as he secured the receipt. "I have paid you. You have got to pay me."

"How? What? I don't understand."

"You have not forgotten the vow I made when you turned my mother out of doors. You had best remember it, for I don't intend to forget it. I told you then the day would come when I would turn you out of doors, and see you beg for mercy in vain. That day will come, Simon Slink. Bear that in mind."

The old fellow looked up with a movement of terror. There was something very firm and earnest in the boy's tone. Then he burst into a harsh laugh.

"Go on, my fine fellow. Do your worst," he answered. "Simon Slink has dealt with sharper customers than you. Yet they have gone and he is here."

"That's true," said Roger, fixing his eyes firmly on the fox-like face before him. "I know that. Edward Homer, for instance."

"What!" This word was fairly yelled, as the old rascal sprung to his feet, his hair almost standing on end with terror. What? That name! Then you know—

"I know a thing or two," broke in Roger. "I know the price of shirts. Can't I put your name down for a half-dozen? Let me show you some samples."

"Shirts!" The old fellow looked frantic with terror. "Where are those papers? You have the papers that your father stole from me! Give them to me! Give them to me, or I'll tear your heart from your body!"

He advanced on Roger with his fingers crooked like claws, and his eyes blazing with insane rage. The boy did not step back an inch. He was not afraid of Simon Slink.

"Then you don't want any shirts?" he demanded, with a mocking smile. "I should think you would. You look as if you had not bought any for ten years. Shain't I book you for a half-dozen? First-chop Irish linen, double gussets, three-ply bosom. Say the word!"

"Gussets! Linen! What do you mean? The papers! The papers, I say! Give me my papers!"

Roger laughed.

"Then you won't buy to-day? All right. I must move on. When you want any shirts give me the chance, Simon. I'll fit you out like a prince."

Roger walked to the door. Old Simon followed with starting eyes and frothing lips.

"You have those papers! I'll have them or kill you! Give them to me or you'll find out what old Slink can do."

His tone was so malignant that Roger could not repress a shudder. It struck him that he had been a fool. The old villain might prove a

more dangerous foe than he anticipated. Perhaps he had got himself into trouble by too long a tongue.

"What are you talking about, old man?" he asked. "What papers?"

"You know! You know, you thief! I'll have them or I'll follow you to the death! Look at me! I have heaps of money. You have none. I'll drive you to starvation. You sha'n't have a situation anywhere but what I'll work you out! You shall not earn a cent in this great city. You shall starve unless you give me back what your father stole from me."

Roger looked at him with a queer smile.

"Go ahead, old chap," he replied. "Turn me out of my situations. Set my employers against me. But you'll have to find them first. I'm my own boss, Simon Slink! Nobody orders me around, or pays me wages. Maybe you can make me discharge myself. Go on. Do your prettiest. But I'll tell you this. I'm bound to be a rich man, and you're bound to lose your ill-gotten gains. And then my day of revenge will come! And it will begin when Edward Homer comes to you with those papers in his hand, and demands the money which his father left, and of which you have robbed him. Tremble, Simon Slink. Your tide of luck is now on the turn."

Without waiting for a reply, Roger threw open the door and left the office. Old Slink looked for a moment as if he would follow and assail him. Then he suddenly broke into a tremble, and tottered back to his chair. Into this he fell, and covered his face with his hands, while a hollow groan came from his lips. He had felt the first arrow of the orphan's revenge.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RACE FOR A THOUSAND.

In Mr. Burnaud's office were two persons, that gentleman and Roger Wilton. The latter held in his hand a packet of papers, which he had just taken from his pocket.

Roger had been telling him a story with which the reader is already familiar, that of the discovery of the hidden papers, and old Slink's terror on being told of it.

Mr. Burnaud sat back in his chair and looked at the boy with a doubtful expression.

"That's a queer business," he remarked. "You seem to be in luck with everything you touch. Here you are going for revenge on Simon Slink, and chance has put a powerful weapon into your hands.—And yet I am afraid you have acted the fool."

"I'm afraid I have," admitted Roger.

"To let out your secret to that old rat."

"It wasn't very smart."

"It was sheer insanity. He would cut your throat for those papers. Take care he don't. You have waked up a tiger-cat, Roger Wilton."

"I am not afraid of him," answered Roger.

"You don't know him. I do. That man would as lief kill you as shake hands with you, to gain his ends. Beware of him. He has plenty of money, and can hire any agents. He will make a strong effort to get back those papers."

"I fear so," replied Roger, with some anxiety. "There was a stranger at our house yesterday. He pretended to have some special business with mother, and asked queer questions. I am afraid he was a spy sent to find out what he could."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Burnaud. "So the fox is at work! By Heaven, Roger, he must not and shall not have those papers! He has done me more than one ill turn, and I would like to pinch the old rogue."

"Do you think he will try to hurt me?" asked Roger, anxiously.

"It is the papers he wants. You must get rid of them. They are not safe in your house."

"I thought so," answered Roger. "I have brought them here. I thought you might be willing to take care of them, and help me to hunt for Edward Homer."

"For whom?"

"Edward Homer. That is the name. Didn't I give it before?"

"Homer? I've heard of that name. Where? I've come across it very lately. Let me see." He leaned his chin reflectively on his hand. After a minute he shook his head. "I can't remember. Have you them there? Let me see them."

Roger handed him the packet. He opened it and carefully examined its contents.

"Not a bad pull for the old speculator. A hundred thousand at least. And I suppose all turned into cash by this time. Ha!"

This last word came in a sharp exclamation. His eyes became riveted on the last paper he had opened, while the color came and went in his face as he read its contents. He seemed to grow intensely excited.

"By the Lord Harry! Well!"

He flung down the papers with a hasty motion and sprung to his feet.

"Why didn't you bring me these yesterday? This morning? I stand a confounded chance of being twenty thousand dollars out of pocket. I might telegraph, but it's ten miles from an office, and delay would play the deuce. What's to be done? See here, Roger. You're a live, active, and lucky lad. Do you want to make a thousand dollars?"

"Well, I think I do!" cried Roger, springing up in equal excitement.

"I'll give a thousand to save twenty. I can't possibly leave here now, but you can. I want you to be fifty miles from here inside of three hours. Never mind the papers. I will take care of them. Will you do it?" He drew paper to him and began hastily to write.

"I'll go three thousand miles to make a stake like that," averred Roger.

"You know my confidential clerk, Ellis?"

"Yes."

"It is now twelve o'clock. At three to-day he is to close a bargain in my name for a property at Millstone, a country village ten miles off the Loring Station of the Erie Road. He must be stopped. I have just found that the property belongs to the Homer estate, and I am buying a lawsuit. If he signs that paper I am twenty thousand out of pocket. If you stop him you are a thousand in. Here is my order on him not to sign. Can you do it?"

"What time does the next Erie Express go out?"

The merchant consulted a time-table.

"Twelve-thirty."

"If I can catch it, the job's done."

"Then don't lose a second. Here! Take my watch. You'll want to count the minutes. And here's money."

He crammed some cash into Roger's hand.

"And, by the way, it is not impossible you may be followed by Slink's agents. Take this. Don't let anybody stop you. Use it, if you have to. But go ahead at any price."

He snatched a pistol from his drawer and thrust it into the boy's other hand.

"Now, quick. You must take a carriage to the station. Can't trust the cars. And drive like Jehu. Follow me."

He ran bareheaded through the store, too excited to think of his hat.

Roger followed him with a gold watch and some bank-notes in one hand and a pistol in the other. The people in the store stared, as well they might.

Most of them, in fact, followed Roger, with the idea that the merchant was flying for his life and the boy was pursuing him with the pistol, with murderous intentions.

Mr. Burnaud hailed a cab just as one of the porters caught up with Roger and seized him by the shoulder.

"Hold up here, youngster. Drop that there revolver. We don't 'low no shootin' here."

"Here! Quick!" cried Mr. Burnaud. "What's the matter, Jack? What do you want with that boy?"

"Ain't he tryin' to shoot you, the young hound?" asked the porter.

"He? No, I guess not. Put up that pistol, Roger, and hide that money, or you'll have the police and the politicians after you."

Despite his haste Mr. Burnaud could not help laughing.

"Jump in," he cried. "Here, cabby, drive like wild. You've only got twenty minutes to reach the Erie station. Come back here for your pay. Off, now."

He slammed the carriage door. A touch of the whip and the horses bounded forward. The carriage whirled swiftly away.

Mr. Burnaud stood looking anxiously after it.

"I hope he will do it," he soliloquized. "I couldn't have done it myself, but the boy may. He's wide awake and has good luck on his side. But what a strange chance it was! To think that I was about to buy a part of that very Homer estate! To give twenty thousand for a property which has another claimant. And the cash is up. If Ellis signs, the money will be drawn inside of an hour after. I can't stop it without producing that deed, and there is no time for that. I hope to mercy the boy will make his time."

There were beads of sweat on his forehead as he turned back to the office. It was decidedly a serious affair.

While he thus communed with himself the cab was flying through the streets toward the station. Roger now took the opportunity to hide his dangerous-looking weapon and to thrust the money into his pocket. He also put on the watch with a proud air. It was the first time-keeper he had ever swung.

With the delight of a child in a new toy he consulted it every minute, watching the streets they passed as he did so.

"We will make it," he said. "But it will be nip and tuck. Can't you squeeze a few inches more out of those slow goers?" he yelled to the cabman.

"No," was the short answer. "Ther' ain't a cab in York 'd do better."

Roger subsided. Yet he continued to consult his watch. The minute hand slipped ominously round. As they swung around the last corner and came in sight of the station building it wanted but one minute of the time.

The carriage drew up with a jerk. Roger sprung hastily out.

"Too late. Can't make it," he cried.

"Yes you can," roared cabby, consulting his watch. "Your time's too fast. It's two minutes to train time."

This was enough for Roger. He dashed hastily forward, heedless of everybody that might be in his way. Inside of a minute he had his ticket. In another minute he was at the train. It had begun to move. The boy ran swiftly forward, swung himself to the rear platform of the last car, and was fairly on board.

He breathed freely, for the first time in twenty minutes. The first step of the ladder had been safely gained.

"Nip and tuck; but tuck has it," he said to himself as he entered the car.

His heart was light. It seemed to him as if the promised prize was already in his pocket.

But he had left unexpected trouble behind him. At almost the moment in which Roger had caught the train, Mr. Burnaud reentered his office. He had taken time in his return from the street to give some orders in the store, and to explain to his excited clerks and salesmen, most of whom had followed him to the street, the cause of his strange behavior. He did not care to be reported as insane, or as flying from an assassin.

This reminded him that in his haste he had left Roger's valuable documents scattered on the floor of his private office.

"It would have been a good chance for Simon Slink's spies if they had followed the boy here," he said to himself with a smile, as he opened the office door.

The smile suddenly left his face. A blank look of astonishment took its place. The papers had vanished.

With a cry of alarm the astounded merchant sprang forward, and looked hurriedly around him, at every conceivable point. It was in vain. They had utterly disappeared.

Intensely excited he rushed back into his store.

"Who has been here?" he demanded eagerly. "Some one has been in my office. Who saw him? Speak, will you? Are you all dumb?"

Several of the men averred they had seen no one. They had followed him to the street. Further questioning brought out from one of the salesmen that he had seen a young man walking back through the store. He had been busily engaged getting out an order, and had paid little attention to him.

"What was he like? Did you notice that?"

"Middle-size. Rather good-looking. Light mustache. Blonde complexion. Wore a business suit of gray. Chesterfield cut."

"Would you know him again?"

"Think I would."

"Then if you should see that man try and find out who he is, and report to me. It is highly important."

Mr. Burnaud walked back to his office, rather crestfallen. Could he have put the papers away and forgotten it? No. They were nowhere to be found. He had proved an unfaithful custodian of the important trust committed to his care.

Little dreaming of the trouble that lay behind him Roger sat back in full enjoyment of his ride. A railroad journey was almost a new experience to him, and he watched the country through which he sped with great delight. He had left behind him all anxiety. The locomotive was doing its best. He might as well take things easy until speed depended on himself again.

"What time is the train due at Loring?" he demanded, of the conductor, as the latter asked for his ticket.

"We pass there at two. This train does not stop. Loring is not an Express station."

"Then how came they to sell me a ticket for there?" demanded Roger, in a troubled tone.

"You have taken the wrong train, young man. Your ticket is for the way train that starts five minutes after this. You will have to get off at the first stop, and take the accommodation, when it comes along."

Here was a check to the boy's ambition. He was in a terrible stew. What to do he could not imagine. Two o'clock hardly gave him time to make the ten miles to Millstone by three. He could never make it by the way train. He sat and conjured and thought until his brain seemed ready to split. To think of it! A thousand dollars gone like a whiff of smoke. More money than he had made in all the hard work and lucky hits since he commenced business.

"If something would only happen!" he groaned. "If the train would break down, or run off the track. Or if they'd stop to water or coal up— Ha!" he cried, as an idea entered into his busy brain. "It might be done. It's worth trying."

He sprang impulsively up, and walked back through the train in search of the conductor. He found the latter individual just as he had finished taking up the tickets.

"Can I have a minute's talk with you?"

"Yes."

"I want to get off at Loring."

"Oh, it's the Loring boy. I told you already what to do."

"I want to get there at two o'clock."

"Then suppose you tell me how."

"Come, conductor, it's a big thing to me. Can't you slack up there and let me jump? You won't lose half a minute, and it will be money in my pocket."

"That makes no difference to me."

"But it will be money in your pocket, too."

"Ah! How do you make that out?"

Roger pulled his bunch of notes from his pocket and selected a ten-dollar bill.

"Stop long enough to let me jump off and that bill is yours."

The conductor reflected, shaking his head slowly. But he kept his eye fixed with a covetous look on the bill.

"Wait," he cried. "I'd like to accommodate you, but I must have a reasonable excuse. A stop would be reported. I'll see if it can be done."

He hurried forward through the train, leaving Roger excited but hopeful.

Fifteen minutes passed. The train stopped at a station. The next stopping-place was twenty miles beyond Loring. But Roger kept on.

The conductor came hurriedly past. He paused for an instant, bent down to Roger's ear, and whispered:

"I will do it. Be ready."

The boy's heart bounded. He began again to eagerly consult his watch. The minute-hand slipped round till it was five minutes to two. The conductor came along again. He once more stopped to whisper:

"Go out to the platform," he said. "Be ready to jump. And—" He held out his hand.

Roger slyly slipped the promised bill into it.

The young traveler got up from his seat and lounged back to the rear platform of the car. It was empty. Not even a brakeman was there. He got down on the step, holding firmly to the safety irons.

There came a slight jerk. The speed of the train was slackening. His heart came into his mouth. Second by second it drew up. The air brakes were on.

The car door opened and the conductor came quickly out.

"Be ready," he said. "But not too soon. Don't take any risk."

The train was still running at more than five miles an hour, when the risky boy swung himself forward and landed on his feet on a platform which they were passing.

"Good-by," he said to the conductor.

"Good-by," the bell-rope was hastily pulled.

The train began to gain speed again.

But Roger had won the second round of his ladder. He was safe on the platform of the Loring station, and it yet wanted two minutes to two o'clock.

CHAPTER IX.

A BIT OF SHARP PRACTICE.

ROGER followed the departing train for a moment with his eyes, and then looked eagerly around him. He saw that he was in a small but active town. The railroad depot opened on a business street that presented a busy aspect.

The young traveler turned to a townsman who stood near him.

"Where can I hire a horse and carriage in this place?" he asked.

"Wal, I dunno," drawled the man. "Mought pick up one at Smart's livery, if that funeral ain't tuk all his hosses."

"If he has nothing better than funeral horses they wouldn't suit me. I'm not making hearse time. Where will I find the stable?"

"Down hereaway. Close by the end of this street."

"Thank you."

The boy laughed as he went onward at double-quick. He was not to be cast down by any trifle. He was bound to have a horse if there was one in the town.

"Team?" said the livery-keeper, as Roger hastily accosted him. "Like to 'commodate you, but reckon as how I can't do it. Ain't got a hoss in the stable. They're all off to Joe Jackson's burying."

"Then you must get me one. And inside of five minutes. I've got to be at Millstone before three, and there's not a second to spare."

"Can't be did." The man shook his head.

"Ain't hardly a critter left in the town. Every hoss is gone to the funeral. It'll be back in half an hour, young man."

"Half an hour! Why don't you say half a year?" fretted Roger.

He was wild at the drawling laziness of the stable-keeper.

"You must get me a horse, I say. And inside of five minutes. I'll pay your own price."

He pushed into the stable. The livery man stood rubbing his sandy poll dubiously.

"Hello!" cried Roger. "What are you talking about, man? What horses are these? Why, here's a pair of prime blacks, that look as if they were full of go."

"They ain't mine. They belong to Judge Loring. Only here on keep. I'd get particular thunder if I'd touch them hosses."

"Judge Loring?" cried Roger. "Not the old judge? He don't own these horses?"

"Reckon he does. Know the judge, young man?"

"Know him? Just you ask him the next time you see him."

The shrewd boy had never heard the name before.

"He'd never refuse me his horses. Come, gear them up. I'll give you five dollars if you put me in Millstone inside of an hour."

The livery man shook his head.

"Wouldn't dare do it, without an order from the judge."

"Where does he live? I'll get you an order."

"Couldn't see him. He is in York. Won't be here before night."

"Why, then he needn't know anything about it. You can have them in the stable again by four o'clock."

The man rubbed his head more doubtfully than before.

Roger chafed inwardly at the dangerous loss of time.

"Come," he said, briskly. "I don't mind a few dollars. Gear up and get me on the road in five minutes, and it will be a ten-dollar bill in your pocket. Here's the stuff."

He held a ten-dollar bill temptingly in the air.

The man was evidently shaken.

"You know the judge?"

"Just ask him if I don't."

"Hand over, then."

He snatched the bill from Roger's hand, crammed it hastily into his pocket, and hurried into the stable. Within a minute he was actively at work, gearing the judge's horses.

"I can't give you much of a carriage. I've only got this old rattler down. All my best turn-outs are at the funeral."

"Anything. So it will hold together."

Roger helped him. Every minute counted.

"Keep your hands off, young man. You know nothin' 'bout harness. Leave it all to me."

In five minutes afterward the horses were geared to a rusty and dusty one-seated vehicle. It was now ten minutes past two.

Roger sprang into the carriage. The livery-keeper jumped in after him.

"I'll drive you over," he said. "I wouldn't trust the judge's hosses in any hands but my own, for a fortune."

"That suits," rejoined Roger. "I know nothing about horses. And if the judge asks any questions you can tell him you just took them out for an airing."

The man answered by a knowing wink.

"But s'pose the judge gets inconvenient, and wants to know your name. What'll I tell him?"

"Tell him it was Roger Wilton that borrowed his team."

A young man who had just entered the stable-yard started on hearing this name. He looked Roger eagerly in the face, and then turned hastily away, with a peculiar expression.

The heedless boy failed to observe this. The driver at that minute had gathered the reins, and started the horses. They bowled away with an easy stretch that delighted him.

"We've got just three-quarters of an hour," he said. "But I want five minutes' grace in Millstone. Can you put me there in forty minutes?"

"If them hosses can't do it without turnin' a hair I'll shoot 'em. I know how to git speed out o' hossflesh. Look at 'em. I tell you they're prime goers."

They had already left the town and turned into a well-made country road, along which the blooded horses sped with an easy, free, swinging motion that was delightful to see. It did Roger good to watch their swelling flanks, and proud toss of the head.

"Talk about a locomotive ride," he declared. "It's baby's play alongside of this. I didn't know the judge kept such horses."

"He won't have none but the best," answered the driver. "That off chap now'd make a racer. He oughtn't never to be drew double. It clean breaks his heart to be kept back by a slow mate."

Thus chatting the ten miles were quickly left behind, and they drove into Millstone with a dashing burst that made the few observers open their eyes with wonder.

It wanted five minutes of three.

Roger straightened himself in his seat, prepared to jump and run if necessary. He looked around him as the horses slackened their speed. Millstone was a small village, of not more than twenty houses. Behind it were hills and quarries. Stone-cutting seemed the business of the place.

"Here we are," announced the driver.

"Where do you want to get off?"

"I want to find Squire Grimes's place."

"That's easy done. I know it like a book. It's that stone house just ahead."

"Drive there, then."

Within a minute the carriage was drawn up in front of a solid-looking stone mansion, that seemed the great house of the village.

"Wait for me. I'll not be long."

Roger jumped from the carriage.

"You'll find me at the tavern," answered the driver. "The critters want a little care."

The active boy dashed up to the door of the house. It was closed. He hesitated a moment and looked around him. To the left was the windows of a large room, one of which was partly raised. A murmur of voices came to his ear from this direction.

At this instant a clock, somewhere within the house, loudly struck the hour of three. The time was up.

Inside the room mentioned was a group of four or five men. One of them, a partly bald dignified gentleman, was seated at a table writing on a paper before him. He now laid down the pen and rose from his chair.

"There, the transfer is all complete with the exception of your signature, Mr. Ellis. Your power of attorney from Mr. Burnaud will make your signature for him binding."

"And the cash?" asked a sharp-featured man standing near.

"I have it in hand. Mr. Ellis's signature makes it yours."

"I have never been in quite such a situation before," laughed Mr. Ellis, a pale-faced, clerical personage. "My signature is not usually worth twenty thousand dollars. It will be long before it will be worth that to me."

He seated himself and took the pen.

"Where shall I sign?"

"Here, sir." The squire placed his finger on the spot. "John Burnaud, mind. Don't make a mistake and write your own name."

"No fear of that. I write his name often than my own. Shall I put it here?"

"Yes."

"No."

This word came into the room like a storm, making everybody start in surprise. It seemed to come from the grounds outside, through open window. Everyone turned. The wind opening revealed a handsome and excited young face, that was peering eagerly into the room.

"Don't sign that paper," he exclaimed. "Orders from headquarters."

Mr. Ellis dropped the pen, and sprung to his feet.

"Who are you? What do you mean?"

He recognized Roger's face at a glance. The rest of the party looked on, speechless with surprise at this interruption.

"Mr. Burnaud sent me," rejoined Roger. "I've made time, you bet. Double quick. Here's the orders."

He passed a folded slip of paper through the window to Mr. Ellis, who quickly seized and opened it. A moment sufficed for him to take in its contents. He turned to Squire Grimes, with a surprised and excited face.

"This changes the affair," he said. "I have an order from Mr. Burnaud not to sign. You will hold the money until further advices."

The sharp-faced man sprung angrily forward.

"What does this mean?" he indignantly demanded. "Are you making a fool of me? The purchase is made. The papers are ready. What am I to understand by this?"

"You can understand that I am an agent, and am acting under orders," answered Mr. Ellis calmly. "I know little more than you where the hitch comes in. All Mr. Burnaud says is that he has discovered that a clear title cannot be given to the property."

A decided change of expression came over the face of the previous speaker at these words.

Roger was still at the window, drinking it all in with avidity.

"All right?" he demanded.

"Yes. The sale is off."

"Lucky I wasn't a minute later."

He was gone as quickly as he came. He had not entered the house. Nothing remained to indicate his visit but the sheet of note-paper that dangled in Mr. Ellis's hand. But that was enough. It had checked the wheels of the whole affair.

In ten minutes afterward Roger was again behind the blacks, bowling rapidly back toward Loring. It mattered little to him what time it took to return. He was a thousand dollars richer than he had been three hours before.

It was half-past four when they again entered Loring. Roger sprung from the carriage near the railway station.

"If the judge raises any row send him to me," he said, with an odd look.

"Ay, ay!"

The team drove away.

Roger entered the station and inquired the time of the next train. None would pass till six o'clock. He had an hour and a half to spare.

"Lucky I'm not in a hurry," he concluded.

"I'll take a stroll around and see the place."

He failed to notice that the man who had heard his name in the stable-yard was watching him. Nor did he perceive that he was followed in his stroll.

After observing the town he took a road that led into the open country, and walked on for half an hour. He then turned to go back. To his surprise two men were facing him with threatening looks.

"Hold fast, my young sprout," said one of these. "Don't hurry back just yet. We've got a trifle of business with you."

CHAPTER X.

IN AND OUT OF A SCRAPE.

ROGER looked at the man who had so rudely accosted him. He was a young and well-dressed man, not bad-looking, though with an evil eye and marks of dissipation on his countenance.

His companion was a sturdy, bluff-faced fellow, that might have been a quarryman but for his white hands, which were evidently not used to hard work.

"What do you want with me?" asked Roger.

"You will be kind enough to take a little brow walk with us."

"Oh, yes. No objection in the world. If you huncle going back to the town."

"But we ain't."

"Then you will have to do without my company."

"You are a smart youth. But you'll do as I've say, for all that. Come, this is our way."

He led the way. "But it isn't mine. What do you want? My money?"

"No."

"Do you want this? If you do, come and take it."

In an instant he had in his hand the pistol with which Mr. Burnaud had provided him.

huncle cocked it with a quick motion.

turn "Now get out of my way. I am only a boy, I can pull a trigger."

The man who had been speaking stepped hastily to one side. Roger incautiously followed him with his eyes. The next instant there came a quick upward stroke from the stick held by the other villain. It caught the boy's hand and knocked the revolver spinning into the air. The man skillfully caught it as it fell.

"The young fox has sharp teeth, but I reckon we've drawn them," he said, with a hoarse laugh. "Double-quick now, boy, or by the blue blazes—"

"Don't shoot," cried the other, hastily. "Do you hear, Roger Wilton? You are in our power now, and you'll be wise not to cut up any capers."

Roger looked from face to face of his captors. It was very evident they were in earnest. His hand pained severely from the sharp blow it had received. And the fellow who had captured his pistol looked as if he would not hesitate to use it.

"What do you want with me?" he asked, sternly.

"We want your company. Turn now, while your skin's whole. I'll not ask you a second time."

Roger turned. The speaker caught him by the arm, and led him forward. The man with the pistol walked behind.

They followed the road for about a quarter of a mile. Then they left it, at a place where it was crossed by a small run. Their course now lay along the valley of this stream for two or three hundred yards, and ended at a small hut, on the bank of the rivulet.

It was a decayed wooden edifice, and seemed deserted. The two men entered it with their prisoner, and closed the door, which hung on but a single hinge.

The place contained no furniture but a moss-grown bench, on which Roger's captor signed to him to sit.

"I am quite obliged to you for taking a walk out this way," he remarked. "It has saved me a heap of trouble."

"What do you want with me?" demanded Roger, angrily. "I have offered you my money already. Take it, and let me go."

"We don't want your money," came the answer. "Keep quiet now, and answer my questions truly, and no harm will come to you. But if you try any trick on us it will be a sorry day for you."

"I don't see how I can keep much quieter," Roger was dismayed, but he was bound not to show it. "Go ahead with your questions."

"You have some valuable stolen papers. It is them I want, and must have. You have come out here to-day for the purpose of disposing of them. They are either on your person, or you left them at the place to which you drove this afternoon. You see I am well informed. You will find it dangerous to trifle with me. Where are those papers?"

Roger heard these words with deep surprise. So Mr. Burnaud was right, and he had played the fool. Old Slink was after him in good earnest. He thanked his lucky stars that he had left the papers in good hands.

"I don't pretend to know what you are talking about," he answered, putting on a show of stolid surprise. "You are welcome to search me, and to keep all the papers you find on me."

"That is what we are here for."

In the next ten minutes Roger was most thoroughly searched. But without effect.

"Where did you drive this afternoon?" asked his captor, sourly.

"To Squire Grimes's, in Millstone. Ask Smart, the livery man."

"Did you leave the papers there? Answer me truly, if you value your health."

"I left a paper there."

"What was it?"

"Likely Squire Grimes will tell you. You wouldn't believe me."

The man looked sternly at the imperturbable face of his prisoner. Roger was working for time. Something might happen to rescue him from these kidnappers.

"I must have those papers," declared his captor, with a stern look. "You will not leave here till I have them. You had best tell me the truth at once. If I fail to get them it will be a sorry day for you."

"Will you believe me if I tell you the truth?" asked Roger.

"That depends."

"Well, then, they are in an iron safe in the city of New York. You will not get them if you keep me here for a year. They will only be returned to myself in person. Do you believe that?"

His captor looked at him closely.

"No," he answered. "I must have an order on Squire Grimes for the return of the papers you left with him. I saw you drive out with Smart, and know that your story is true, so far. Here is paper and pen. Write me an order on Squire Jacob Grimes for a return of all papers which you left with him to-day."

He drew from his pocket a slip of paper, and a stylographic pen. A piece of board that lay on the floor of the hut served as a desk. He dictated an order, which Roger wrote without hesitation.

"Will that answer?"

"Yes."

The man spoke a few words aside to his quiet companion. Then, tearing a handkerchief into strips, they proceeded to bind the prisoner's hands and feet.

"This is only the first step," said the man sternly. "I will take Smart with me and drive to Millstone. Every step you have taken to-day will be traced. If they are not there, then I will have an order on your mother to deliver them. And I will know how to work on her fears. Meanwhile I leave you in this man's care. You will not escape. Nobody is likely to come near this hut."

He walked out, leaving Roger in the hands of his grim and silent keeper. The boy stretched himself on the bench. He was decidedly in for it, and he felt that he might as well take it easy.

A half-hour passed without a word. The keeper was seated in a crouching attitude on a broken stool in the corner, silent and surly-looking.

"I don't see what you expect to get out of me," remarked Roger, tired of the long silence. "This nonsense about papers is all twaddle. Let me go, and keep my pistol as a present."

The man made no answer.

"Take what money I have. See here, old fellow, I ain't used to this sort of thing."

The keeper kept as motionless as a statue.

"Deaf, dumb, and blind, I suppose," growled Roger. "Might as well talk to a stone wall. Well, then, I'll go to sleep. Got to kill time somehow."

The man continued voiceless.

With a groan of spite Roger rolled over on his bench. In ten minutes he was as good as his word. He was sound asleep.

A half-hour passed. Then Roger was suddenly awakened. He sprung hastily to a sitting posture on his bench. Some loud sound had come to his dreaming senses.

The keeper appeared equally startled. He was on his feet and at the door. Hearing Roger move, he turned savagely toward him.

"If you whisper a word, youngster, I'll put a bullet through you," he growled out.

There now came a repetition of the sound that had roused the sleeping boy. It was a heavy rap on the door, as if with the butt end of a whip.

"Who's in there?" came a loud voice. "Open the door. We've had a break-down and want a bit of rope to tie up the harness."

"I haven't any rope," answered the keeper through the door. "There's other houses down the road. You can get some there."

"You needn't be so gruff about it," came another voice, which Roger recognized. "We're ready to pay for what we get."

"Pay somebody else, then."

The sullen fellow menaced Roger with his pistol. But the daring boy was ready to take the chances of a bullet.

"Mr. Ellis!" he cried loudly. "I am here! Held prisoner! Break open the door!"

The keeper sprung toward him in a rage, leveling the weapon.

"Shoot, if you want to hang for it," cried Roger, boldly. "The mischief's done, and a bullet won't save it."

There had been a momentary silence outside, following Roger's words. Then the cry came:

"There's some rascality going on here. Open the door or we'll break it down."

The loud hammering was resumed.

After a moment's hesitation the surly rogue turned toward the door.

"Hold up there, you fools. I'll open it," he growled.

He threw back the bolt, flung open the door, and faced them, pistol in hand.

"Is this a way to break into a man's house?" he roared fiercely. "Now get away while your skin's whole, or I'll shoot the pair of ye."

"I'm here, Mr. Ellis! A prisoner!" cried Roger. "Break in. He daren't shoot."

The keeper uttered a savage oath at these

words. He turned with a violent impulse and fired at the helpless boy.

Then he bounded out, menacing the two men with the weapon. They drew hastily back, and in a moment he dashed away down the course of the run.

Mr. Ellis rushed hastily into the hut, in doubt whether murder had not been done. But he was quickly reassured.

"He didn't touch me," cried Roger. "I rolled off the bench. Here, cut my hands and feet loose. Don't you know me? I'm the boy that brought you the order, out at Squire Grimes's."

"Ha! Is it you? And what in the world are you doing here?"

As he spoke he cut Roger's bonds with his pocket-knife. Instantly the freed boy sprang to his feet.

"I don't altogether know what brought me here," he ejaculated. "But I know what's going to take me away, and that's a pair of lively legs. Off for town, Mr. Ellis?"

"Yes."

"So am I. Missed the train, though. Look for your rope and let's get out of this. It's unhealthy. I'll tell you all about it outside."

A piece of rope was found, after some search. They then hurried to the carriage, which had been left in the road. While the driver tied up his broken harness Roger gave a rapid account of his late adventures to a deeply interested audience. There was only one point on which he was non-committal—the character of the papers which his captors had attempted to force from him.

A half-hour more brought them into the town of Loring. The six-o'clock train had passed. There would not be another till nine.

The time sufficed for Roger to give, before a magistrate, a description of the assault that had been made upon him, and of the appearance of the persons who had attacked him. One of them was out with Smart, the livery man, and would probably be back in an hour or two.

The return of Smart was awaited with some interest. He drove in, about eight o'clock, alone.

He had driven a stranger over to Millstone and back, he said. But his fare had been hailed by a friend, about a mile out of town, and had left the carriage.

It was evident that the vultures had taken the alarm, and made their escape.

At half-past ten that night Mr. Ellis and Roger reached the New York station. At eleven they were at Mr. Burnaud's house.

They found the merchant still awake and up, too full of anxiety for sleep.

"What have you to say?" he cried, eagerly.

"Won or lost?"

"Won."

"Then the promised prize is yours, Roger, my boy," he gladly responded.

"There's one thing more," answered Roger, eagerly. "They are after those papers, hot. I hope you have them in a safe place."

Mr. Burnaud's face fell.

"They have got them," he acknowledged. "I have proved an unfaithful keeper. They are stolen; vanished; gone! They have beaten us, Roger."

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT A YEAR BROUGHT FORTH.

A YEAR has passed since the date of our last chapter. It has been a year full of incidents, far too numerous for us to mention. We must very rapidly run over the story of our characters during this interval.

One mystery yet remains undivulged. The papers which so mysteriously disappeared from the floor of Mr. Burnaud's office have not been found.

It was at first supposed that they had been stolen by an agent of Simon Slink, and returned to that individual. But this theory has been disproved by Simon's own behavior. His spies have continued to follow Roger Wilton throughout the year, and have hung around every place which he is in the habit of visiting.

To make the matter sure Roger managed, on one occasion, to get his mother and the children off on an excursion, and leave their rooms vacated. He himself kept on the watch, and was rewarded by seeing a man, whom he recognized as one of Slink's spies, enter by a false key, and make a complete search of the rooms.

On another occasion he called on old Slink himself, and was satisfied, by his behavior, that he was not in possession of the lost papers.

"Whoever has them, it is not Simon Slink," he said to Mr. Burnaud.

"Then who has them? They would be no use to any sneak-thief that might have picked them

up. And I have advertised a reward, and no questions asked, but it hasn't brought them."

"It is a mighty queer thing," reflected Roger. "I wonder if Edward Homer is hanging around here in disguise, and if it is he that has got them."

Mr. Burnaud gazed at the boy for a minute with a look as if he thought him out of his senses, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"That is what comes of having an imagination," he exclaimed. "Try again, Roger. That's a neat guess. See if you can't beat it."

"Anyhow there's just as queer things happen in this world," answered Roger, a little vexed at this laugh. "But never mind that, Mr. Burnaud. The papers are gone, and it wasn't your fault. They may turn up again. If they don't I will have to get at old Slink some other way. I am not going to let up on that blood-sucker if it takes my lifetime."

Mr. Burnaud looked at him as if he did not quite like this bitter spirit of revenge. But he changed the subject.

"What are you doing now, Roger, in the way of business?"

"Just bought a cargo of bananas," answered Roger, quietly.

"What's that?" Mr. Burnaud almost jumped from his chair. "A cargo of bananas! What do you mean, you risky young speculator?"

"I got them dog cheap," answered Roger. "I'll tell you all about it. It seems there was a case of sickness on board, and the captain run the quarantine. He was afraid all his bananas would spoil if he was kept back. Well, the quarantine officers were after him, and he had to get away double quick to save his bacon. I knew that, and I made him a lump offer for the cargo, which he jumped at. The fruit is all landed, and the vessel off. Five thousand dollars cash, and they're worth ten thousand, for there's hardly another banana in the city."

Mr. Burnaud looked at the quiet speaking boy with open eyes and mouth.

"Five thousand cash? But where did you get it? I know you haven't two thousand in the world."

"I paid what I had, and got a commission man to advance the balance," rejoined Roger, easily. "I'm to pay him ten per cent. But I can do that. The bananas are going off like hot cakes. There won't be one of them left by Saturday morning."

Mr. Burnaud continued to eye him with a strange expression of face. He finally jumped up and caught Roger by the hand and shook it warmly.

"I believe it now," he cried. "You will be rich. You've got boldness, and judgment, and luck, and they'll make any man rich."

"You bet I will. And then won't I put a snap judgment on old Simon Slink? I only want to get rich to get even with him."

This conversation will give some idea of Roger's operations throughout the year. His speculation in bananas was not quite up to his calculations, but it yielded him a clear three thousand profit, which, added to his former gains, gave him a capital of about five thousand dollars.

This was but a specimen brick of his year's operations. Eager to get rich, he took the most risky ventures. But luck stood by him, and he won where most men would have lost.

But his most daring operation was to buy at public sale a property of considerable value, which went at a ruinous figure, on account of the title being disputed. It was then in litigation in the courts, and the case seemed so doubtful that it was knocked down to Roger at a very low bid.

Mr. Burnaud shook his head very seriously on being told of the operation.

"Why in the world did you not consult me?" he demanded, half angrily. "You can't go on in this reckless way forever."

"But look how cheap it went."

"Cheap! It brought more than it's worth, for it's worth nothing. It's about like that property at Millstone, that I backed out of in time. The lawsuit is bound to go against your man, and if it does you are seven thousand dollars out of pocket. Every cent you have in the world gone at a whiff."

"But if my side gains I can sell it to-morrow for twenty thousand."

"Don't tell you your side can't gain? The case is as clear as daylight. I am angry at you, boy. I know your luck, but this is tempting Providence. You might as well have bid three thousand as seven. Nobody would have bid against you—Well, Mr. Ellis, is that affair all right?" This was to his confidential clerk, who had just entered.

"Yes, sir."

"And what is the news on the street?"

"Why, I hear that there is a strange turn over in that Lincoln estate lawsuit. A paper has just been offered in evidence that completely upsets the prosecution. They say the defense is bound to win."

Roger sprang up and cracked his heels.

"What do you think now of a dumb risk," Mr. Burnaud?" he cried gayly. "Luck's on my side again."

"The Old Boy helps his imps!" answered the astonished merchant, striking his hand heavily on the table. "I give it up. I wouldn't have given five hundred yesterday for that house."

"You can have it to-morrow for twenty thousand," said Roger.

"I won't take it, my boy, for it's worth more. In that location it ought to bring thirty thousand. I'll believe in everything now. Go ahead. If the moon is put up to-morrow, buy it. You're bound to make off of it, if you have to retail it out for old cheese."

Mr. Ellis and Roger laughed heartily at the earnest manner of the merchant.

The lawsuit turned out as Mr. Ellis had predicted. The defense won the case, and Roger got his property with a clear title. Within a month he sold it at the price Mr. Burnaud had suggested. He was a clear thirty thousand dollars ahead of the world.

It was a splendid start for a boy of twenty, ardent, hopeful, sharp, full of spirits, and the very picture of luck. His vow that he would be rich looked in a fair way to be fully realized.

But yet the affair with Simon Slink remained unchanged. No sign of the missing papers appeared, and Roger was in despair of ever seeing them again.

As for Simon Slink, men said that he was growing richer daily. Those who knew best declared that he was secretly speculating, and that he was using the funds of the Trust Co. in this manner. But he was rich enough and successful enough to snap his fingers at all such ill-natured remarks.

Roger listened to all this with deep interest. Speculators sometimes meet with a serious tumble. He prayed that such would be the fate of Simon Slink.

Meanwhile a new idea came to himself. There was more money for a lucky man on Wall street than in the channels of trade. It was there that men with capital got rich rapidly. The bold boy felt like bucking against Simon Slink in the stock market.

It was about this time that he made a new acquaintance. Being one day in the establishment of Cox & Co., the shirt manufacturers, he was introduced by Mr. Cox to a fine-looking young man, to whom Roger took as if by instinct.

"You two ought to know one another, for you are both the picture of luck," said Mr. Cox, with a laugh. "Whatever goods Wilton touches turn to money, and it is the same with Harry Plum's stocks. You ought to hitch horses."

"Is this the young Mr. Wilton that there was so much talk about for the lucky hit he made with the Lincoln property?"

"The same."

"Then he beats me hollow. I have been three years at it, and haven't made that much yet."

"In the brokerage line?" asked Roger.

"Yes."

"I wish you would tell me something about it. I don't understand the thing at all."

"You've asked the right man, then," said Mr. Cox, with a laugh. "Harry has it all down pat. Puts and calls, blinds and straddles, bulls and bears, he can tell you all about it. You can't put yourself in better hands."

The two young men walked away talking as intimately as if they had known each other ten years.

Roger proved an apt scholar. It was not long before he knew the *modus operandi* of stock speculation.

Two months afterward he made a proposition to his new acquaintance which was quickly accepted. Roger Wilton entered the brokerage business in partnership with Harry Plum. He had first dabbled a little in stocks, and made some successful hits on 'change.

Roger had now raised a fair mustache, and no one dreamed that he was below the legal age, as he had the wit to keep his age to himself.

It was noted, however, that the new firm of Plum & Wilton entered into bolder operations than Plum alone had ventured. There was new blood in the veins of the firm.

Another year passed rapidly away. The young speculator reached the age of twenty-one. And he did so with a personal cash capital of sixty

thousand dollars, and his half of the valuable brokerage business of the firm.

The Wilton family now moved out of their narrow rooms into more spacious apartments.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREAT CORNER IN WHEAT.

We have paid so much attention to the fortunes of Roger Wilton that it is time we were going back to the office of Simon Slink, his money-loving opponent.

On the day in which Roger attained his twenty-first year old Simon was in his office, as dusty and disreputable a place as ever.

Little he cared for dust and litter, however, as he sat there amid his papers, rubbing his hands with a great show of satisfaction.

Before him lay a long foolscap sheet, thickly covered with figures.

He had just laid down the pen, after completing his calculations. There was evidently something in them of a highly enjoyable character, for it was that which brought such a grin of satisfaction to his face.

"It's done," he cried gleefully. "I've got my million at last. After years and years of grubbing and toiling I am a millionaire. I swore I would be, and I have kept my oath."

He paused suddenly, and a look of disquiet came upon his evil face.

"If my track was only covered, he muttered. "There is only one dangerous spot in my career. Those papers. If I had those deadly papers. But the boy lies. He hasn't got them. He has heard the story from his rascally father. If he had them he would have used them long ago. He hates me too much to keep quiet. Ah! that vow he made to be revenged! That vow! I can never get it out of my head."

He shuddered slightly. But this feeling only lasted for a moment.

"A truce to that! I am a fool to let such thoughts disturb me. I have my million, and can snap my fingers at the world. Suppose the papers do appear. The money is in the Trust Fund. It need not disturb Simon Slink. He is no blind idiot."

He rose from the chair and stretched his old limbs, as he walked about the room.

"Shall I stop now?" he soliloquized. "I vowed to stop when I had my million. And so I will when I get my money out of that wheat speculation. A million! I will have two million when that is settled. We have got a corner on the market that must win. Ha! ha! we have the mouths of the community nicely pinched. We control already two-thirds of the wheat in the country, and we'll have it all yet."

He continued to walk up and down.

"That's the last. I'll never speculate again. It's too risky. It's too risky. I may do a little safe shaving for amusement, but I won't speculate. But this corner is sure. Ha! ha! this is sure."

He was interrupted in his self-gratulations by the opening of the door, and a step in the hall. He hastened to hide the paper on which he had been calculating his fortune.

The door opened, and a tall, stout person entered, a keen-faced, thin-lipped individual. There was something of a grave look on his countenance.

Simon sprang hastily forward and held out his hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Josephs. How goes the syndicate, eh? Good news, I suppose. Squeezed wheat up a peg, hey?"

"No," answered Josephs, gravely. "It has gone down."

"Gone down?" Old Slink staggered back to his chair and sat down with a very rueful face.

"Yes," returned Mr. Josephs, more briskly. "It seems the farmers held more reserve wheat than we calculated. They are pushing it into the Chicago market, and have knocked wheat down a peg."

"But—but what?"

"We must buy all they offer. There is nothing else for it. This is the last pull, Mr. Slink. If we get hold of this we have the game in our hands. But the syndicate will have to put up another margin, and step into the market again."

"Another margin?" Old Slink turned blue.

"Yes. There will be a meeting at three o'clock. Get your hat. We have barely time to get down there. Another ten per cent. installment will cover it. That will not be more than two hundred thousand on your shares."

A hollow laugh came from the miser's lips as he looked for his hat, his hands trembling as in an ague.

"Two hundred thousand!" he said, with an effort at humor. "Only two hundred thou-

sand! A mere trifle, of course. But suppose there is more wheat to back, and this fails?"

"There is no more, I tell you. The country is drained. I can show you the statistics of the last crop, and how much has been put on the market. We know to a bushel how much is in the country. I tell you it is a sure thing."

Slink shook his head a little doubtfully, as he followed the confident Mr. Josephs from the office.

While this conversation was proceeding there was much talk on the street on the same subject. The great wheat syndicate, which had worked up a severe corner in the staff of life, had got a serious black eye, from an unexpected output of wheat by the farmers, and brokers everywhere were shaking hands with the hope that the rascally speculation had been broken, and the speculators ruined.

"They are counting too fast," said Harry Plum to his young partner. "There is a heap of money yet back of this corner. You will see that they will not let it go by the board."

"Who are the men that are working it?" asked Roger, carelessly.

"There are only a few of them known. People say that Will Josephs and Al Whitaker are in it. And I'm told that Simon Slink, the note-broker, is one of the gang."

"Simon Slink!" Roger was on his feet in trembling excitement. "Are you sure of this, Harry?"

"Yes. What is the matter? I know you don't like old Slink. But why does this affect you so?"

"That is the one man I hate on the face of the earth," declared Roger. "And I'll tell you this. He is a Jonah who will sink any ship he enters. They call me a lucky man, Harry Plum. Well, I'm going to back my luck against Simon Slink's. He is buying wheat. I am on the market to sell wheat. I am worth sixty thousand dollars to day, and I will put up the last cent as a margin."

"Are you crazy, man?" Harry stared at his partner in surprise.

"Not quite crazy. If you are wise, you will follow my lead."

"Not much. I can't afford it."

"I will go alone then. Win or lose, I am bound to buck against Simon Slink."

Roger was as good as his word. He sold short on wheat and put up his whole capital as a margin, in spite of all the advice and warning of his friend.

Several days went by, during which the street anxiously watched the wheat market. There was more than one fortune hanging on its rise or fall.

Slowly it recovered. The late fall was wiped out. It gradually rose until two cents a bushel was added to the price.

Harry Plum looked oddly at his resolute partner.

"Another cent rise and your margin will be swept out," he said.

"Then you had better come to my rescue. It is sure, I tell you."

"I don't understand you," asked Harry.

"Why do you so hate Simon Slink?"

"Sit down, and I will tell you."

Harry sunk into an arm-chair, and Roger proceeded to relate the story with which we are already familiar. He had a deeply interested auditor. Particularly when he came to the story of the discovery of the papers, and their effect on Simon Slink, did Harry become wrapped up in the account.

It almost seemed as if he had a personal interest in it, by his change of color, and the eagerness of his questions.

"I don't wonder you hate him, the old villain," he growled, with a savage intonation that surprised Roger. "The oppressor of the widow and the robber of the orphan! But no trace has been found of this Edward Homer? Has he been fully searched for?"

"Mr. Burnaud has made every effort. But in vain."

"He may turn up yet. Meanwhile—"

"Well?"

"I will make good your margin."

"What? Are you in earnest?"

"Yes. Such a man as this cannot win. I hate him as much as you."

Roger turned and looked at his partner. He could not understand his tone and manner.

They were interrupted by a message from Roger's broker. Wheat had risen another cent. The margin was exhausted, and must be made good or abandoned.

"Leave that to me," said Harry, hastily seizing his hat, and leaving the office. "We will sink or swim in this ship together."

An anxious day or two passed. Wheat rose yet another cent. The syndicate seemed triumphant. And then there came an ominous whisper on the street. Wheat was again pouring into Chicago, from the Northwest.

That there was an excitement on the street need not be said.

Harry Plum, who had left the office twenty minutes before with his hat down over his eyes, and his face as long as a liberty pole, came hastily back, flinging his hat in the air, and his face covered with smiles.

"What has broke loose?" asked Roger. "Something new about wheat?"

"Yes. It is coming. It is coming, boy. The farmers have wakened up, and are going for the high price. The great Northwest is pouring out its wheat. Ten thousand bushels in to-day. Twenty thousand coming to-morrow. Let that keep up for a week, and the corner is busted."

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Roger. "Simon Slink is in it. I knew that if we went against him we were safe."

The wheat market opened with a decline. Down it went, one, two, three points. It was almost a panic. Unless the syndicate could take these new offerings, it was ruined. It had already invested millions.

Simon Slink was distracted. He was ready to tear out his hair for his folly. After gaining the million, for which he had struggled so many years, he had let avarice draw him into this dangerous speculation. And now he saw himself on the brink of ruin.

There was no drawing back. All safety now lay in the forward path. He had already put all his available money into the speculation. Where was he to turn for more? He had property, but that could not be converted into cash. But there were the funds of the Trust Company. They were completely under his control. He could borrow what he pleased, and return it after the success of the corner.

So Mr. Josephs, the tempter, whispered in his ear. Make one more break. Send wheat up a peg or two more, and they would sell. Simon bit at the bait. He drew all the available cash from the company's vaults, and invested it in the great corner in wheat.

It was not without an object that he made this last move. Josephs had given him an idea. Let wheat rise a cent or two more, and he would sell out, pocket his profits, and victimize his confederates.

But he was not the only one with that idea. Harry Plum and Roger Wilton were not asleep.

"How much cash have you left, Harry?" asked Roger.

"About forty thousand."

"Then go on the market and sell. Sell to the last penny. That's my advice."

"But they have checked the fall," said Harry doubtfully. "Wheat is moving up again. It is a half-cent higher than yesterday."

"They can't hold it. It will go down again with a splurge. You'll see. But don't let me lead you. Use your own judgment."

Harry sat and thought deeply for a few minutes. Then he seized his hat and hurriedly left the office. It was a half-hour before he returned.

"I have sold," he remarked, briefly. "Sold to the last penny. At a dollar five."

"Good. We are both in the same boat now. We will sink or swim together."

Harry threw off his hat, sat down, rubbed the perspiration from his forehead, and seemed to sink into a deep study.

"Do you know why I have taken your advice, Roger?" he asked.

"No."

"It is because I hate Simon Slink as bitterly as you, and would do as much to ruin the old robber. I have never told you the story of my life. If you don't mind listening I will give you a few points."

"I shall be glad to hear it."

"It has not been a quiet life, I can tell you that. I was not a very good boy. But my father was so hard on me that he drove me into mischief. But I needn't tell you all that. It is enough to say that I fell in love when I was hardly nineteen. My father was very bitter and severe about it, and treated me so harshly that I ran away from home. I changed my name and went West, determined to trust to myself for the future, and build up my own fortune."

Roger listened with great interest to this story of a wild life.

"Changed your name, and went West," he repeated. "How did you succeed?"

"Very poorly. I won and lost. I concluded finally that the chances were better here than

there. I had learned that my father was dead. What became of his property I did not care. I was sure none of it would be left to me, and I did not want it. I came back to New York and opened a broker's office."

"But what has this to do with Simon Slink?"

"I will tell you. By a very strange chance I came into possession of my father's will and the papers relating to his property. I learned, to my surprise, that it had all been left to me. But it had disappeared. What had become of it I did not know. I did not try very hard to find out, it is true. I was satisfied to paddle my own canoe. Therefore it was not until you told me your story, the other day, that I learned that Simon Slink had swallowed up the whole estate. From that moment I made up my mind to make him disgorge."

By this time Roger was on his feet in a state of high excitement.

"Where did you find your papers?" he asked, eagerly.

"On the floor of Mr. Burnaud's office."

"And what is your real name?"

"Edward Homer."

Roger dropped into his chair as if he had been shot. He was so utterly taken aback that he had not a word to say.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "CORNER" COLLAPSE.

THE office of the President of the Royal Insurance and Trust Co. is a very different-looking place from Simon Slink's private office. Yet there is but little change in old Simon, as he sits there among his luxurious surroundings. With his rusty suit, stooping shoulders, and parchment-like skin, he looks very much out of place in that richly-furnished room, with its velvet and bronzes.

Little the old rascal cares for all this. It is past three o'clock, and the business of the bank is over for the day.

"To-morrow," he says to himself, "I will do it. What do I care for them? Let every man look out for himself in this world. That's my motto. I am afraid of the market. We have stiffened it again; but it is shaky, it is shaky. I will sell out to-morrow. Simon Slink is not going to be made a cat's-paw of in his old days." He was interrupted by the entrance of the cashier of the company, with some papers to sign.

"Have you seen the last edition of the *Mail*?" he asked, as the president affixed his signature.

"No. Full of lies as usual, is it?"

"I can't say whether it is a lie or not, but it has an interesting bit of information."

"Ah! what is that?"

"Everything is at sea on the street. Wheat has made a terrible tumble. They say that the great corner is broken, and everything has gone to pot."

The pen dropped from Simon's fingers. His knees began to tremble. In a minute his teeth were chattering, and he was shaking from head to foot as in an ague.

The cashier looked at him in amazement.

"What is wrong, Mr. Slink?" he asked. "I hope you are not sick."

"No, no," muttered the old rogue. "You left that door open, and let in a draught.—The corner broke! Ha, ha! I knew it was some newspaper lie. The corner is too strong to break. It has all the wheat in the country in its pocket. What's to break it?"

"Why, they say that one of the gang has turned traitor, and sold out. Will Josephs, I believe it is. He put a block of a hundred thousand bushels on the market just before three. But he has been making heavy sales privately these two days. The price is broke. Wheat fell two cents at a surge. Nobody knows what figure it will open at to-morrow."

Simon listened to him with fallen jaw. He looked for the moment as if every drop of blood had left his body. Then a hot flush came to his face, his eyes flashed, his limbs stiffened.

"Will Josephs!" he yelled, in a tigerish rage. "He! the infernal traitor! I'll have his blood! By Heaven, I'll have his blood!"

He sprang up as if he had been moved by a powerful spring, snatched his hat and ran for the door with a face so wild and terrible that the cashier shrunk back in affright.

"What does this mean?" asked the astounded officer. "Is he in it? It looks so, though I never suspected it. And he has been drawing heavily on the Trust funds. Good heavens, I fear the Institution may be on the brink of ruin!"

The next day dawned. Wall street was in a

terrible excitement as the hour of business approached. No man could say what the day would bring forth. The fortunes of many of the men there present hung on a thread.

Wheat opened at a dollar. The excitement was redoubled. There came a wild pressure to sell. On all sides wheat was forced on the market. Down it went to 99, 98, 97½. No one could say where it would stop.

"Our fortunes are made, Roger Wilton," cried Harry Plum, rushing wildly into the office where sat Roger. "What shall we do? Close?"

"No. The panic has not reached its climax yet. Wait."

By noon wheat had touched 95.

"Let us close our contracts," suggested Roger. "I doubt if it will go lower."

"I agree with you," said Harry.

He was right. It went no lower. After fluctuating for an hour about that figure it began to rise. The market closed at 97.

But the two daring young brokers had made their fortunes. When that day ended they were worth, between them, three hundred thousand dollars. Roger's instinct had proved better than Harry's judgment.

There was another story afloat to which, in the light of the excitement, the brokers had paid little attention. It was said that Will Josephs had been met and stabbed by Simon Slink, who was completely beside himself.

Josephs had been taken home dangerously wounded, and Slink had been confined, raving like a maniac. In his fit of temporary insanity he had made no effort to make his contracts good. They were sold out at the panic price, and Simon Slink was ruined. Worth his million a week ago, to-day he might not be worth a penny.

"It is my last speculation," said Roger Wilton. "I had Providence on my side in this, but I will take no blind risks."

"Nor I," answered his partner.

These words were spoken a week after the day of the great excitement, and in Mr. Burnaud's office.

"You have feathered your nests very well as it is," remarked that gentleman. "But what is this you tell me? That Harry Plum and Edward Homer are the same person?"

"Yes, and that it was he that took the papers from the floor of your office."

Mr. Burnaud looked around with a serious face at the young man.

"That was not a square operation," he rejoined. "It needs some explanation."

"I think I was justified in keeping my own," replied Harry, or Edward, as we had better call him. "But I owe you an explanation."

"I think you do."

"On the day on which you lost the papers, I had occasion to see you on some matter of business. I forget now what it was. At any rate, when I reached your store and walked in, I found everybody running wildly out. I was at first inclined to follow, but I was in a hurry, and went back to your office instead, thinking to find you there. The office was empty, and the floor carelessly strewn with some legal-looking documents. Now, I never could bear to see things littered, and I stooped down to pick up some of these scattered papers. I had no thought of reading them, but my eye was caught by my father's name on the outside of one of them. This aroused my curiosity, and I naturally opened the paper. What was my astonishment to see that it was my father's will, and that it left all his estate to me!"

"I should fancy that you would be slightly surprised."

"I hastily examined the remaining papers, and found that they all related to the same estate. They were all mine. My first impulse was to secure the papers and leave the store. I obeyed this impulse. I took possession and quietly slipped out of the store. The salesmen had returned, but they were grouped together, busily talking, and no one observed me."

"Well, well, that explains the mystery, anyhow," said Mr. Burnaud, rubbing his chin. "And it has puzzled me not a little, I tell you."

"I have been equally puzzled," replied Homer.

"I read your advertisements, and discovered that the police were on the hunt for the lost papers. But I kept shady. I thought I would bide my time, and mystify you as much as possible. And I wanted to get on my feet from my own efforts before I accepted any help from my father's estate."

"And you have done so bravely," said Mr. Burnaud. "Thanks to your own skill and Roger's luck."

"It was so odd that we should go into partnership together. It was not until he came to tell me the story of his life that I discovered the real villain with whom I had to deal. Up to that time I blamed you with pocketing my inheritance."

"It is a strange retribution," remarked Mr. Burnaud gravely. "Simon Slink's career of fraud is at an end. The heartless villain has lost his all, and is at the bottom of the ladder again. He is amply punished."

"He is not half-punished," exclaimed Roger, who had remained silent. "Not till I see him in the position in which he placed my mother will I be satisfied. I have not forgotten my vow of revenge."

"But they say he is still in the asylum, dead, crazy," rejoined Edward, "and that Josephs is very low from his wound."

"You have not heard the latest news," declared Roger. "He has recovered his senses and been discharged from the asylum, and Josephs has taken a favorable turn. He will get well."

"At any rate Slink has lost his money," broke in Mr. Burnaud. "He is reduced to poverty."

"Not much he is," exclaimed Roger. "He can snap his fingers at us yet. He has turned over his real estate to the Trust Company, and closed out his debt. And he still holds his stock and the office of president. There is nothing to hinder him building up a new fortune, by shav- ing with the Trust funds."

"Is all this so?" cried Homer, his eyes flashing with excitement.

"Every word of it. I have not lost sight of him for a moment. He owes me a debt that is not yet paid."

"And me. Has the estate held in trust for Albert Homer been accounted for in this settlement?"

"I think not. If you take my advice you will find out."

"I certainly will. Am I not justified in that, Mr. Burnaud?"

"Yes. Your claim is a just one. And old Slink is a villain that deserves to be pushed to the wall."

Two days after this conversation a claim was made on the Royal Insurance and Trust Company that created a breeze of surprise and excitement in that concern.

The papers of the Homer estate were placed on record, and a demand made for a settlement with the legal heir, whose inheritance the company held in trust.

It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Those perilous papers, which had been so mysteriously rescued from the fire in which the villain had sought to burn them, had at last risen in evidence against him, and his ruin was complete.

Old Slink was utterly vanquished by this assault from an unexpected foe. He did not lose his senses, but all his energy and vim disappeared. The fight was quite taken out of him. He acknowledged everything, gave up the property which the Trust Company held as security for his stock, and moved from his expensively furnished house to the meager apartments formerly occupied by Mrs. Wilton and her family.

Roger observed all this with keen eyes. His vow had not yet been accomplished, but it seemed in a fair way of being so.

The discomfited rogue feebly hoped to save some relics of his property, but the active measures of the court, which pushed the affair with pitiless vigor, threatened to sweep every penny from his grasp.

The whole affair was laid bare, and excited so much public indignation that it was determined to make a severe example of this robber of the orphan.

In consequence his property was pushed to a forced sale, and went at such a figure that Edward Homer was obliged to buy in the greater portion of it to secure himself from loss.

The affair ended in the utter impoverishment of the ruined miser.

"I'll take one of those properties off your hands," said Roger Wilton to his partner, the day after the sale.

"Which one?"

"The house in Germon street."

"The one in which Slink is now living?"

"Where he has rooms, at least."

"All right. It is yours, at the price I paid for it. But what do you want with it? Are you going into real estate?"

"The rooms he now occupies were occupied by my mother three years ago. He was landlord then. I wish to be landlord now. I told Simon Slink on that occasion that the world

would turn round and that they who were on top would come to the bottom, and they who were on the bottom would come to the top.—It has turned round. It is my day now."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE.

SEVERAL weeks passed after the date of the collapse of the great wheat bubble. The world of speculation returned to its old level, and the wreck of ruined gamblers was removed. Those who had grown rich in the game went into the dangerous business more wildly than ever. And the great whirlpool dragged in ever new prey, and hurled them in ruin on the rocks at its bottom.

But the firm of Homer & Wilton took care to keep out of the whirl. They had made their stake out of the broken wheat corner, and had wisely concluded to do only a safe business in the future.

As for two other of our main characters, Will Josephs had sufficiently recovered from his wound to enable him to move feebly around his room. His treachery had saved his fortune, but it had ruined more than one of his confederates.

The most demoralized of the whole party of plotters was Simon Slink himself. All the life seemed gone out of his dried-up carcass, he was reduced to a shadow of his former self, and he sat like a statue in his contracted home, hardly moving even to get the food to keep his miserable body and soul together.

What little money he had retained gradually vanished. Rent day was coming round, but he was too stunned to be able to look that far forward.

Meantime Mr. Burnaud had renewed his old attentions to the widow, Mrs. Wilton. He had not forgotten that they were lovers once, and during the years in which Roger had been making his fortune, the rich merchant had kept up intimate relations with his old flame.

He had more than once proposed to find them better quarters, but to this Roger had seriously objected. He was going to make his own way in the world, and wanted no "lifts."

He and his mother, with his little brother and sister, were now established in a pleasant house on Fifty-fifth street, beautifully furnished, and far beyond the wildest dreams of the boy three years before.

"This isn't a bad beginning, Mr. Burnaud," he said, as he welcomed that gentleman to the new home. "You haven't forgot what I told you three years ago?"

"You're a perfect terror at making money," answered the smiling merchant. "Who would have ever thought the boy had it in him, Mrs. Wilton?"

"I wouldn't for one," replied that lady, who was now a handsome middle-aged woman, without a shadow of the old trouble on her face. "When I sat, three years ago, in the cold street amid my poor relics of furniture, the world seemed to me at an end. When Roger said then that he would be rich I looked on it as mere child's prattle."

"I said more then," rejoined Roger, his lips curling bitterly. "I made a vow not only that I would be rich, but that I would see old Simon Slink brought to poverty, and reduced to the condition to which he had brought you. The time is coming. His rent is due, and is not paid. My revenge shall be complete."

"Oh, Roger!" cried his mother, holding up her hands. "To think of you being so bitter and hard-hearted!"

"You had better let up on him, Roger," advised Mr. Burnaud.

"I have sworn," answered Roger. "I will keep my oath. I wouldn't be so bitter but for one thing; but that I can never forgive. When my mother begged that he would at least not touch my father's desk, the heartless wretch snatched it up with his own hands, and flung it brutally out of doors, and then called my father a dog. It is that for which he shall atone, to the bitter end."

"But think, Roger," suggested his mother. "He has atoned for that. That one act it was which ruined him. Only for that we would never have found Mr. Homer's papers, and the robber would yet have been enjoying his ill-gotten wealth."

"I don't care for all that," said Roger sternly. "He is living in my house, and he shall be driven to the wall, as he drove us to the wall."

He took his hat and left the room, to avoid further discussion.

Mr. Burnaud looked at the widow, who wore a very distressed face.

"I can understand Roger's feelings," he remarked. "The boy is not hard by nature, but he has been terribly roused."

"I don't believe in revenge," answered she. "And yet I hate that old wretch. It is hard to pity a man like him."

The boy walked morosely on, full of bitter thoughts and resolutions. Just then there was not a shadow of pity in his soul. Yet deeper feelings were working beneath revengeful thoughts. He was not cruel at heart, and was not one to carry revenge to the bitter end.

His walk ceased at the office of a real estate agent.

"Has the rent been paid for the rooms on Germon street, occupied by Simon Slink?" he asked.

The agent consulted his books.

"No, sir. It is five days overdue."

"Very well, sir. Demand it again to-day. If it is not paid—"

"What shall I do then?"

"Take legal measures of ejection. And without delay. If he does not pay within the time required by the law set him and his goods out on the street."

"No grace, sir? He seems to be a poor old man."

"Not a day!" answered Roger, harshly, as he walked down the office.

It was a cool autumn day, shortly after the date of this conversation, that Roger hurriedly entered the house, his face full of excitement.

"Get on your things, mother," he cried. "Quick. I want you to go somewhere with me. And get Tom and Lucy ready. I want the whole family."

"What in the world is the matter?" exclaimed the good lady, all in a flutter. "Where do you want us to go, Roger?"

"Never mind. You know I don't do things without reason. And I've got a big reason for this. But I won't tell you what. It is a surprise."

Mrs. Wilton asked more questions, but Roger would tell her nothing. Finally, in sheer despair, she obeyed him, and got herself and the children ready for the street.

Taking the cars they were soon on their way down-town. Roger was talkative enough. He seemed feverishly so. But he would not talk about the purpose of their journey. Mrs. Wilton was in a perfect stew of curiosity ere they had got far on their route.

They left the cars far down-town and took a cross-way toward the East River side of the city.

"Wherever are you taking me?" she cried.

"Why, it's our old street!" exclaimed little Tom, in a glee of delight. "Look, mamma. There's the steps I tumbled off of and bloodied my nose. And there's the candy-shop where I used to buy sourballs."

Mrs. Wilton looked at her grave-faced son, a new light coming upon her face. She began to see through the mystery.

There was her old home, where she had passed so many happy and so many sad hours. To her surprise, it looked as it did at her last recollection. A heap of furniture incumbered the pavement, and men were engaged in carrying other pieces out of the house.

She looked at Roger with a pitiful face.

"Come on, mother," he said. "The world has turned round since those old days. Then you were triumphed over by a heartless villain. It is your turn to triumph to-day."

There was a group of neighbors on the street, watching the ejection. Several of them Mrs. Wilton recognized. They had been present at that similar scene three years before.

They recognized her with a cry of congratulation.

"It does one's eyes good to see you, Mrs. Wilton," exclaimed a buxom dame. "I'll not forget the day you were turned out of house and home. Sure the old rascal that turned you out is trying it himself to-day. We had pity for you, but we've got none for him. Come and gloat over the villain that's got his deserts at last."

They turned the corner of the heap of household goods. There, in the midst of them, as Mrs. Wilton had sat with her children on that past occasion, sat Simon Slink, the very picture of woe-begone despair and hopeless misery.

He seemed completely dazed with his misfortunes, his eyes were fixed helplessly on the ground, and his fingers were working uneasily, like a man who has nearly lost his mind.

"Look at him, mother! Look at him, Tom and Lucy," said Roger, impressively. "That is what I brought you here for to-day. I vowed you should see your enemy in the state in which he saw you. There he is. My vow is accomplished. Simon Slink, the heartless money-grabber—the sordid miser—the detestable villain—has got his deserts."

Mrs. Wilton looked on the hopeless wretch with a momentary feeling of triumph. Then his utter imbecility roused a sense of pity in her heart, and she turned her eyes sadly away.

"This is too much, Roger," she said. "You have driven him too far."

"Not a whit," answered Roger, sternly.

These words seemed to rouse the old scoundrel. He raised his head feebly, and lifted his eyes to see who stood before him.

This movement was followed by a sudden change. His face grew suddenly reddened, a look of fright came into his bleared eyes, he thrust out his hands as if to repel a phantom.

"Avaunt!" he yelled, in a tone of terror. "Avaunt, you ghosts! Why are you here from the dead to glare on me? Away! It is my wicked past come back on me! My wicked past! Ah! the wrong, the wrong, the cruel deeds I have done!"

"Do you repent them?" demanded Roger, with a change of face. "Do you repent the heartless deed you did here, three years ago?"

"Bitterly! Bitterly! I am a changed man! I will never do a wrong act again!"

"Come, mother," said Roger. "My vow is accomplished. And it has done good work if it has cured Simon Slink of his avarice. Come. I don't want you to look longer on this sorry sight."

Roger led his mother away from the scene. There were tears in the good lady's eyes. And Roger's face had grown wonderfully softened. Its bitter sternness had disappeared.

While Mrs. Wilton stopped to speak with several of her old neighbors who accosted her, Roger had a short conversation with one of the men present, a sturdy carman of his old acquaintance.

And the family had hardly left the scene ere this carman brought up his car, and began to load into it the ejected furniture. Simon looked up at him without a word.

"What are you after?" asked one of the neighbors.

"I've got my orders," answered the man. "The boy's got a heart, though it's my notion it's wasted on old Slink."

The furniture loaded, the old man was placed on the seat with the driver. He yielded as helplessly as if he had been a log of wood, instead of human flesh and blood.

"I have had my revenge," remarked Roger, that night, to Mr. Burnaud. "I will never make such a vow again."

"I am glad you took pity on the old wretch at last," and the warm-hearted merchant squeezed Roger's hand. "What have you done with him?"

"Sent him to a small country place over in Jersey," answered Roger. "He can keep his good resolutions better among birds and trees than among men. I will see that he does not come to want."

"You have a noble soul, after all, my boy. And that is more than I at one time thought."

A few words more, and we must take leave of the characters with whom we have so long kept company.

Five years have passed since the event just recorded. Edward Homer and Roger Wilton are still in partnership as stock brokers, and are rapidly adding to their wealth. Roger yet lives with his mother, though it is said that he will soon have a home of his own, as he is deeply in love with a beautiful maiden of his native city, whom he has known for years.

And the story goes that the widow will not be left long solitary, but that Roger's marriage will soon be followed by the union of Mr. Burnaud and his old love. As for Tom and Lucy they already regard the kind-hearted merchant in the light of a father.

Old Simon lives in his country home, far happier than he had ever been in his wolf-den in the city. And there seems to have been a radical change in his character. Roger's compassion went to the depths of the old miser's soul, and stirred up there the seeds of good that had lain latent for years. But he is rapidly failing and must soon pass away. Folks say he has grown too good to live long.

THE END.

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